NEW

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INSIDE:

POKÉMON SCARLET & VIOLET

THE STORY OF POKÉMON

THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL FRANCHISE IN THE WORLD

EVERY GENERATION EXPLORED ✸ ICONIC ANIME ✸ UNFORGETTABLE GAMES

100% UNOFFICIAL

Digital Edition

FUTURE

SIXTH EDITION

WELCOME

Hello there! Welcome to the world of *Pokémon*. For over 25 years, this series has entertained leagues of aspiring Trainers. Starting as a mere idea in the mind of Satoshi Tajiri, drawing from his experiences catching bugs as a child, it grew into a duet of Game Boy games that captured the hearts of Japan. From then, the Pocket Monsters set their sights on taking over the rest of the world by storm.

Evolving to encompass videogames, toys, cards, manga, anime and more, *Pokémon* rapidly turned into a multimedia behemoth. Its Super Effective strategy of maintaining that popularity with regular updates of new monsters, games and regions to explore has ensured that it's the most successful media franchise in the world. Today, it's almost impossible to find someone who doesn't recognise the likes of Pikachu, Ash Ketchum or the iconic Poké Ball logo.

Inside this special celebratory bookazine, we're going to take you on a journey from the very first Generation of *Pokémon*, all the way to the ninth. On our quest, we'll learn about how each era brought something new to the series, explore each and every Pokédex expansion and delve deep into the stories behind the videogames, television series and more. Whether you're a Pokémon Professor or an aspiring Pokémon Master taking their first steps towards the Indigo Plateau, we're confident that you'll enjoy the ride.

Your very own *Pokémon* legend is about to unfold.

A world of dreams and adventures with Pokémon awaits. Let's go!

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THE
EVOLUTION OF
POKÉMON
TM

EXPLOSIVELY POPULAR IN THE NINETIES, POKÉMON HAS OUTLIVED THE INITIAL FAD AND BECOME ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR SERIES OF GAMES. NICK THORPE TALKS TO THE DEVELOPERS ABOUT THE SERIES THAT CHALLENGES YOU TO "CATCH 'EM ALL"...

It's extremely hard not to be aware of *Pokémon* – if you haven't been tempted by the urge to catch 'em all, you probably know someone who has. The videogames have sold over 368 million units, with some titles topping the 10 million mark. It's far more than just a gaming phenomenon, though – since the series launched in the UK back in 1999, Pikachu's smiling face has appeared everywhere from trading cards to cinema screens. However, it may come as a surprise to many of you that the origins of the series go all the way back to 1990.

The *Pokémon* series has always been primarily developed by Game Freak, a Japanese team which grew out of a fanzine of the same name produced by writer Satoshi Tajiri and illustrator Ken Sugimori. "When we first started, some of the readers were actually programmers and they had the skills and access to the hardware – that's how we started in producing videogames," Sugimori explained in a *games™* interview on the history of the series. The firm made its debut in 1989 with *Quinty*, a Famicom puzzle game localised for the North American NES market as *Mendel Palace*. That same year, the Game Boy was released and Game Freak moved quickly to outline a vision of a new type of RPG, which would utilise the handheld's link cable and portable nature. A design document entitled '*Capsule Monsters*' was ready by 1990.

» Junichi Masuda has overseen the whole series.

» Shigeru Ohmori directed the more recent entries.

When you examine the *Pokémon* games on the most basic level, they are fairly typical Japanese RPGs with a few key twists. The first is that as a Pokémon Trainer, instead of gathering party members through the storyline, you recruit the monsters you encounter in the wild. This element is present in the early design documents, though the original idea involved players ▶

▶ having a charisma stat, whereas in the final game they simply lower a wild Pokémon's health until it can't resist being captured in a Poké Ball. These monsters have special types, such as Fire and Water, which make some Pokémon more or less effective against others. The second major twist is that the games each contain a strong multiplayer element, atypical of RPGs, in which players can trade their creatures or engage in battles. Some Pokémon even require trading to evolve into their stronger upgraded forms. This was also a key part of the pitch document, forming the centrepiece of Satoshi Tajiri's vision for the game.

The final twist is that each game comes in at least two versions, with a select number of Pokémon absent from each. The brainchild of Shigeru Miyamoto, a friend and mentor of Tajiri, this was a stroke of genius – rather than having the ability to obtain all the monsters with enough dedicated solo play, players were required to engage with the multiplayer functions of the game. Also speaking to **games™**, composer and programmer Junichi Masuda explained, "People say that when you're playing videogames, you're usually playing on your own. So we wanted to create an experience where you can play the game but still play together with friends at the same time and all have fun."

The game went into development, changing ita title to *Pocket Monsters* due to trademark difficulty, and stayed there for a very long time. Despite having been pitched soon after the release of the Game Boy, *Pocket Monsters* wouldn't arrive in Japan until the start of 1996 – a time when the monochrome hardware looked to be on its last legs. *Pocket Monsters Red & Green* followed the standard RPG model outlined earlier, with the key differences changing the goal of the game. The single-player quest involved gathering eight badges from battling Gym Leaders – other Trainers that served as bosses – before taking on the Elite Four and your rival, as a final boss run. Once that was done, the social aspect of the game became necessary as you sought to complete your collection of 150 Pokémon.

The wrinkle in the formula was that there was actually another creature, the 151st Pokémon, Mew. The 'Mythic' monster was added late in development in space created after the game's debug tools were removed, an untested addition that would be unthinkable today. Luckily, Mew didn't cause problems – it turned out to be something of a solution. Unavailable during regular

» [Game Boy] The story in the games usually involves ferrying items around or beating up an evil faction.

» [Game Boy Color] *Pokémon Gold & Silver* established the convention of adding new Pokémon in sequels.

POKÉMON SILVER SCREEN

There's a good chance that your first exposure to the *Pokémon* franchise didn't come from the games but the animated series. It follows Ash Ketchum's adventures as a Pokémon Trainer, accompanied by his trusty Pikachu and initially Gym Leaders Brock and Misty, who were later replaced by a rotating cast of companions. Along the way they take part in Gym Battles and capture new Pokémon, and are regularly attacked by inept Team Rocket grunts Jessie and James, along with their talking Meowth.

The show has been a huge success and remains in production today, with over 1,100 episodes produced as well as an astonishing 23 animated movies. The first film grossed over $163 million and was briefly the highest-grossing movie based on a videogame – a record later taken by the 2001 adaptation of *Tomb Raider*. In 2019 the series took bold steps into live-action cinema with *Detective Pikachu* – which now has a sequel in the works.

The *Pokémon* cartoon series has had five episodes removed from circulation globally, predominantly to show sensitivity following real-world disasters, along with three more removed from the English-language run due to issues such as use of weaponry. However, the biggest controversy was an episode featuring the virtual Pokémon Porygon, which sent hundreds of Japanese children to hospital in 1997 after triggering fits with flashing imagery.

» [Game Boy Color] While *Gold & Silver* supported the GBC, both still worked on the original Game Boy.

» [Game Boy Color] Maps reflected the change from day to night, with towns growing dark and lights switching on.

play, Mew did occasionally appear via glitches and rumours of how to obtain it began to form. Mew was able to be distributed to cartridges at special events, the first of which was a competition in CoroCoro Comics which attracted 70,000 entries. Word of mouth spread and the game's initially sluggish sales turned around, later aided by additional merchandising. Though *Pocket Monsters Red & Green* were released in February 1996, they didn't hit their peak sales until the summer of 1997.

After a lengthy localisation delay, *Pocket Monsters* – now retitled *Pokémon*, and in *Red & Blue* versions – arrived in the USA in 1998, then Europe and other PAL territories in 1999. The slow build seen in Japan wouldn't be a factor in these territories, as *Pokémon* arrived with a co-ordinated marketing blitz that saw the TV series, trading card game and videogames hit almost simultaneously. A craze started almost overnight, helped along by additional special versions such as *Pokémon Yellow*, which starred Pikachu and took elements from the TV series. Ultimately, the first 'Generation' of games sold over 23 million copies. But while the first games were still making waves internationally, a sequel was needed for Japan and arrived in late 1999.

"You can still play together with friends at the same time and all have fun"

Junichi Masuda

Pokémon Gold & Silver served as the first massive overhaul to the series, providing a brand-new quest in a new region, Johto. The most immediately obvious new feature was a visual overhaul as a result of Game Boy Color support. However, the changes went far deeper. A battery-powered real-time clock was included in the cartridge, affecting what happened in-game. Certain Pokémon were more abundant during the day while others could only be found at night, and other events only took place ▶

▶ on specific days of the week. New Pokémon could now also be acquired by breeding almost any of your acquired existing creatures, allowing for exclusive moves. Two brand-new types of Pokémon were also included, Dark and Steel, which were intended to address some of the balance issues with the first game – particularly the dominance of Psychic Pokémon.

However, the big new inclusion was that of 100 new Pokémon. These included extra evolutionary stages for existing Pokémon, such as Pichu, the baby form of Pikachu, and Slowking, a second stage for Slowpoke which serves as an alternative to the first game's Slowbro. Also, another special event Pokémon like Mew was included in the form of Celebi. Masuda, who would become director of the series following *Gold & Silver*, explains the philosophy behind new additions: "I always like to come up with the number first. When I'm envisioning what the world is going to be like, I think about what kind of Pokémon people are going to encounter there, and then how many are we going to need, so I come up with the number first usually."

***Pokémon Gold & Silver* were massively successful worldwide, achieving 23 million sales in a much shorter period than the first Generation of games due to quicker localisation**. An enhanced third version followed with *Pokémon Crystal*, but new hardware was already on the horizon in the form of the Game Boy Advance. A new generation of games was already on the way, this time titled *Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire*.

> **"I always like to come up with the number first..."**
> Junichi Masuda

A BREED APART

Lots of alternative monster-raising games are available for hipsters to enjoy...

MONSTER RANCHER

FORMAT: PlayStation
YEAR: 1997

■ Tecmo's spin on the genre offers similar battling gameplay to *Pokémon*, but a very different monster acquisition system. Players generate new creatures by putting music CDs into the PlayStation's disc drive!

DRAGON WARRIOR MONSTERS

FORMAT: Game Boy Color
YEAR: 1998

■ A spin-off of Enix's RPG series, this was the strongest *Pokémon* competitor on the Game Boy, offering 215 monsters and a deep breeding system which helped set it apart. PlayStation and 3DS remakes have followed.

JADE COCOON

FORMAT: PlayStation
YEAR: 1998

■ The game's unique look was created by Katsuya Kondo, an animator and character designer famed for his work on Studio Ghibli films such as *Kiki's Delivery Service*. Decent sales ensured that a PlayStation 2 sequel followed in 2001.

DIGIMON WORLD

FORMAT: PlayStation
YEAR: 1999

■ Bandai's rival franchise has never scaled the same heights as *Pokémon*, but the games are fondly remembered by those who grew up with them. One difference is that only one partner Digimon accompanies you throughout the main quest.

FINAL FANTASY XIII-2

FORMAT: PS3/Xbox 360
YEAR: 2011

■ The middle child of Square Enix's RPG trilogy lets players capture monsters during battle, to serve as party members. As in *Pokémon Red & Blue*, there are roughly 150 monsters to collect and strengthen.

These games took place in another new region, Hoenn. "With the Hoenn region I wanted to go for a feel of abundant nature," explains Masuda. "When I was younger, my grandparents lived in Kyushu and I would visit them, and whenever I was there I'd always be catching bugs, playing in the river, catching fish and stuff like that, so I wanted to bring that feeling of nature to the games." The cohort of new Pokémon included 135 creatures, raising the total number to collect to 386. However, despite support in the code for all 386, only 202 could be caught in *Ruby & Sapphire* and trading with previous Generations was impossible, creating a problem that the developers would need to solve later. Major improvements were made to the battle system, including team battles in which four Pokémon could fight and a new ability system, which gave Pokémon passive powers that affected battle.

However, the biggest change was an expansion to the non-battling play available, with the inclusion of Pokémon Contests in which your creatures would perform their moves in front of a judging panel, in competition with other Trainers. "At the time when we were developing the games, we really wanted to think of a way to expand the appeal of the Pokémon games," reveals Masuda. "So we thought of a variety of ways that people could enjoy gameplay with Pokémon without battling them." Despite this attempt to expand the appeal of the series, *Pokémon Ruby* & *Sapphire* didn't sell as well as previous games. However, even a dip below par for *Pokémon* produces results that other series can only dream of – with 16 million copies sold, the games were comfortably the bestselling titles on the Game Boy Advance.

CARD CATCHER

Taking the battles from cartridge to cardboard

The Pokémon Trading Card Game, first introduced in October 1996 in Japan, is an unusual spin-off product in that has taken on a life beyond that of the videogames. It depicts battles similar to those in the videogames, with a few key differences – Pokémon are able to evolve during the course of the battle, and must utilise Energy cards to attack and retreat. The game ends when either one player has no Pokémon in play, or a player has revealed their six prize cards by knocking out opposing Pokémon.

When *Magic: The Gathering* publisher Wizards Of The Coast licensed the game for English-speaking audiences in the late 90s, many players ignored the battling gameplay and focused on trading and collecting. The popularity of the cards was such that many schools banned them, fearing problems with thefts and uneven trades. A foil Charizard was the most prized card from the first base set – a first-edition copy in good condition can still fetch a pretty penny today.

The Pokémon Company assumed worldwide control of the game in 2003 and continues to offer it both as a physical card game and a digital version (for PC, Mac and iPad). But if you're looking for a more retro way to enjoy it, the card game received its own GBC adaptations, too. Hudson Soft's 1998 *Pokémon Trading Card Game* tasked the player with beating AI opponents in an RPG-style quest. It was well-received by players and critics alike, selling over two million copies and spawning a Japan-only sequel in 2001, which eventually received a fan translation in 2012.

"We thought of a variety of ways people could enjoy gameplay with Pokémon without battling them"

Junichi Masuda

» [Game Boy Advance] Some moves became more useful thanks to *Ruby* & *Sapphire*'s team battles, since they hit all opponents.

In 2004, *Pokémon FireRed* & *LeafGreen* were released. These were the first *Pokémon* remakes, and according to Masuda were a part of the plan as soon as the series moved to the Game Boy Advance.

» [Game Boy Advance] The GBA's graphics allowed designers to make towns that looked more realistic.

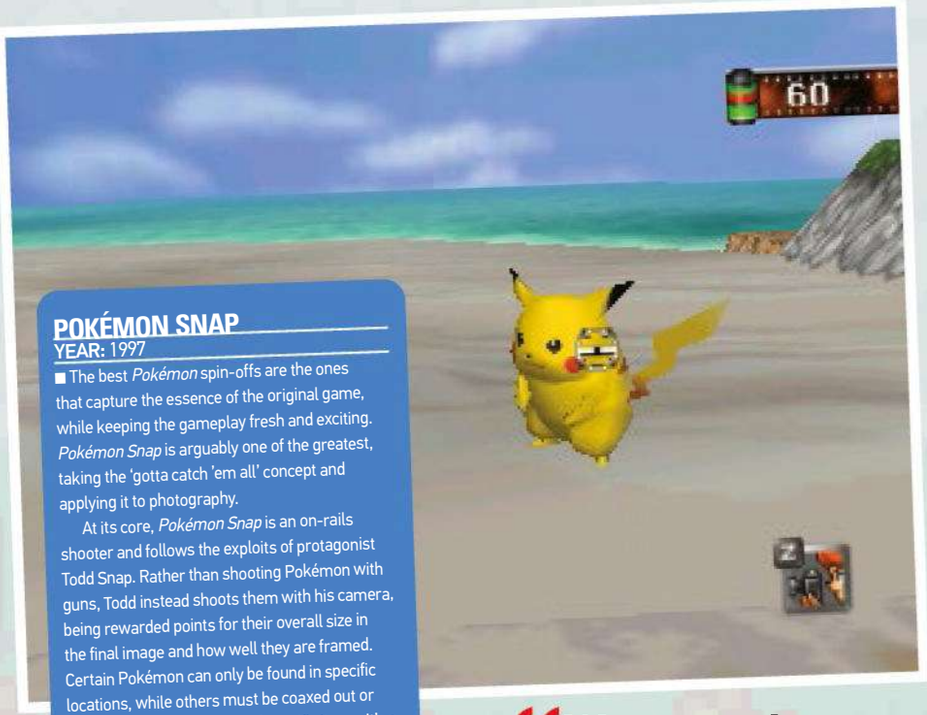
» [Game Boy Advance] *Ruby & Sapphire* introduced rival factions of evildoers to defeat – Team Aqua and Magma.

"One of the main reasons [for developing remakes] was really more of a technological reason, as the hardware couldn't communicate with each other between the Game Boy and the Game Boy Advance. Even when we were first developing *Ruby & Sapphire* we knew we wanted to players to be able to catch all of the old Pokémon as well as the newer ones." *FireRed & LeafGreen* were faithful remakes with improved visuals and some expanded content to include *Ruby & Sapphire*'s improvements, most notably an additional post-game quest in the new Sevii Islands region. Success followed once again, with critical acclaim and around 12 million sales.

The Game Boy Advance was superseded by the Nintendo DS at the tail end of 2004, but with *Pokémon FireRed & LeafGreen* having just completed their worldwide release cycle, it was clear that all eyes were still on the older systems. While the DS received the forgettable spin-off *Pokémon Dash*, the Game Boy Advance got *Pokémon Emerald*, a substantial game which served a similar purpose to *Pokémon Crystal* by providing an enhanced third version of *Ruby* & *Sapphire*. Fans would have to wait until 2006 to get their hands on the fourth Generation of *Pokémon* games. ▶

THE SPIN-OFFS

There are an insane number of Pokémon offshoots, so we decided to look at the best and worst examples



POKÉMON SNAP

YEAR: 1997

■ The best *Pokémon* spin-offs are the ones that capture the essence of the original game, while keeping the gameplay fresh and exciting. *Pokémon Snap* is arguably one of the greatest, taking the 'gotta catch 'em all' concept and applying it to photography.

At its core, *Pokémon Snap* is an on-rails shooter and follows the exploits of protagonist Todd Snap. Rather than shooting Pokémon with guns, Todd instead shoots them with his camera, being rewarded points for their overall size in the final image and how well they are framed. Certain Pokémon can only be found in specific locations, while others must be coaxed out or flushed by using a number of specific items. It's a great game and it's a delight that a follow-up was released decades later in 2021.

HEY YOU, PIKACHU!

YEAR: 1998

■ No doubt inspired by the interest in Tamagotchi, developer Ambrella clearly thought the concept could be applied to *Pokémon*. It couldn't, as proven by this innovative yet highly disappointing game. Players use the N64's Voice Recognition Unit to interact with Pikachu. It can take part in a variety of activities, from fishing to making stew, but poor controls and rudimentary voice technology make it too frustrating to play. Spiritual sequels exist in the form of *Pokémon Channel* for the GameCube and two *PokéPark* games for the Wii.

> **"We wanted to go more in-depth and actually have Pokémon appear in the game world"**
>
> Shigeru Ohmori

POKÉMON STADIUM

YEAR: 1999

■ When Nintendo revealed *Pokémon* was heading to the N64, we assumed an awesome 3D-based RPG. We assumed wrong.

Despite our initial disappointment, *Pokémon Stadium* proved an essential addition to any Poké-fan's collection, due to its ability to let you transfer – via the Transfer Pak – Pokémon from *Red & Blue* and battle with them in glorious 3D. Fighting takes place across four cups, with the player choosing from six available Pokémon. It's essentially just the scrapping from the original games, but made better due to the impressive-looking visuals. We'd argue the sequel is the better game, however, due to some truly brilliant minigames.

POKÉMON PINBALL

YEAR: 1999

■ *Pokémon Pinball* was another early *Pokémon* release that proved Nintendo's Pocket Monsters were perfectly at home in other genres. It's most memorable for being one of the first Game Boy Color games to feature the underused rumble pack, resulting in an oversized cartridge. While the physics are a little off at times, the two tables – Red and Blue – are well-crafted and feature lots of interesting spinners and ramps. Best of all, however, are the 'Catch' and 'Evolution' modes that see you either trying to capture or evolve a specific Pokémon in under two minutes. And if you want that true Pokémon vibe, then use the Pokédex to catch all 151 Pokémon.

POKÉMON CONQUEST

YEAR: 2012

■ Quite possibly the strangest *Pokémon* game we've played, but a good one to boot. *Pokémon Conquest* is a kiddie-friendly strategy game that splices the popular franchise with Tecmo Koei's *Nobunaga's Ambition* series. It works surprisingly well with the player travelling the Ransei Region, battling Pokémon, warriors and warlords in a bid to unite the region as one nation. It's a vastly different RPG compared to the usual games and offers plenty of tactical play, while its weird crossover status should ensure it becomes quite rare in later years.

POKÉMON MYSTERY DUNGEON

YEAR: 2005

■ The big hook of *Mystery Dungeon* was that it was the first time you could properly play as Pokémon. The fact that its two versions let it link between the Game Boy Advance and DS didn't make it too shabby either. For those unaware, it's effectively Game Freak's spin on the roguelike genre, with Pikachu and pals exploring popular locations from the series and taking part in turn-based battles. While easier than most examples of the genre, it's still quite tricky in places and link up with both versions is crucial if you want to gain access to all the available Pokémon.

POKÉMON RANGER

YEAR: 2006

■ Trust Nintendo to make drawing patterns interesting. Unlike previous *Pokémon* games, *Ranger* requires you to capture Pokémon by drawing specific circles around them. It's clearly used as a justification for the DS's unique control system, but it admittedly works well, getting quite challenging on later stages. Unfortunately, while the minigame-based capture sections are good fun, the main adventuring is pretty dull and feels quite light compared to typical *Pokémon* adventures.

POKÉMON DASH

YEAR: 2004

■ The best thing about this DS launch game was its ability to link up with GBA versions of the available *Pokémon* to create new courses to race on. Unfortunately, that's the only thing this insipidly dull game has going for it. Racing Pokémon through checkpoint-based courses sounds great fun, but the reality is vastly different due to incredibly bland track design and overly simplistic gameplay. Pikachu runs in whichever direction you swipe, which is as dull as it sounds, while a variety of different terrains and power-ups attempt to inject some entertainment into Ambrella's game.

» [Nintendo DS] While 3D visuals made their debut in *Diamond & Pearl*, not much else changed graphically.

***Pokémon Diamond & Pearl* brought a raft of changes for fans to enjoy, many of which were by now series standards.** The game took place in the brand-new Sinnoh region, a large island bisected by a long mountain range. Eight new Gym Leaders and a new Elite Four were available to battle, and 107 new Pokémon were added for players to catch, bringing the complete total up to 493. The battle system was also further refined, with many attacks reclassified as physical or special based on how they operated – for example, Volt Tackle became a physical attack as it involves one Pokémon making contact with another, while Shadow Ball doesn't and therefore became special. However, the most exciting new possibilities were a direct result of the series' move to a new platform.

For a start, the DS was Nintendo's first handheld platform to be designed for 3D graphics, which had the potential to revolutionise the way the games were presented. However, *Diamond & Pearl* were relatively tentative steps into 3D – battles received an improved set of 2D sprites so only the environments were overhauled in 3D, and they rarely offered much functional difference to their 2D counterparts. Still, they did allow for some surprising new design possibilities, as Masuda recalls: "One of the great things about moving to the 3D environments with the DS games was that we could do a lot more dynamic presentation, for example moving the camera around freely. It's kind of hard to explain, but being able to control the camera actually changes the

» [Nintendo DS] Pokémon can follow you outside of their Poké Balls in the second-Gen remakes.

THE UNLIKELY LADS

Some Pokémon that are freaky, unnatural and downright impossible

MAGCARGO

■ With a body temperature stated to be over 18,000 degrees Fahrenheit, this Pokémon is absolutely incredibly hot. How hot? Almost twice as hot as the surface of the sun, which reaches only 9940.73 Fahrenheit, fact fans...

SPOINK

■ This pig-like creature has a rather unfortunate life – if it ever stops bouncing on its springy tail, its heart will stop beating. That's right, it dies. We prefer a Tigger-esque state of compulsion to a life-or-death situation, frankly.

TRUBBISH

■ It's a bin bag! More specifically, it's a bin bag with tie-top ears, a broken glass mouth and arms that look like spilled waste, formed from a chemical reaction within domestic and industrial waste. This makes perfect sense, of course.

YAMASK

■ This ghostly Pokémon retains memories of its former life, as well as a mask it occasionally looks at while weeping. Oh yes, and these guys are human ghosts – so what awaits you in the afterlife, it seems, is captivity. Sweet dreams.

VANILLITE

■ Created by British designer James Turner, Vanillite is a Pokémon which strongly resembles an ice cream cone. In fact, its snowy topping can be made to melt, exposing a bald, icy head. It gains extra scoops as it evolves, too.

▶ balance of the game quite a bit." In *Diamond & Pearl*, you can see this best in the design of the Gyms – for example, a low camera angle in Eterna Gym allows Trainers to hide behind trees.

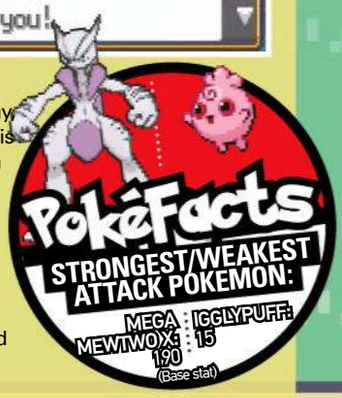
The other massive change was the addition of online connectivity. The DS was Nintendo's first real foray into online gaming, and Pokémon was a key part of the software supporting the move. For the first time ever, players with access to a wireless internet connection could battle and trade their Pokémon without being in close proximity to one another, and without the need for additional peripherals. It was a huge step forward for players looking to complete their collections and prove their teams against Trainers worldwide. However, the advent of online play meant that nobody ever needed to leave their home to catch 'em all. It's at this point that creating a main series *Pokémon* game for home consoles might have seemed most appealing, and it's something fans have often requested. However, Masuda sees things differently.

"One of the reasons that we continue to feel that handheld platforms are the best place for *Pokémon* is that with a handheld platform, you can take the game with you. We really like to focus on creating incentive for people to meet up with each other in real life. For example, if there's a special Pokémon distribution, people will go to meet each other and fans will talk... about the games. Creating that kind of atmosphere, kind of like a festival, is something that we really like with the *Pokémon* games. Obviously you

» [Nintendo DS] Legendries are typically encountered once, disappearing if you knock them out or fail to catch them.

can also play them at home alone now, and that's another way to play, but being able to do both of them is one of the best parts of being on a handheld platform."

It's an understandable position, especially as the handheld games continued to perform so well. *Pokémon Diamond & Pearl* sold a combined 18 million and were followed by an enhanced third version in 2008, *Pokémon Platinum*. A fifth Generation of games was on the way, but once again a remake project would serve as an interlude. *Pokémon HeartGold & SoulSilver* remade *Gold & Silver* as full fourth-Generation *Pokémon* games, with brand-new visuals and all of the system changes that had been implemented. They also came bundled with the Pokéwalker, an LCD toy that allowed players to transfer their Pokémon from the cartridge via an infrared link and raise their stats simply by walking around. The



» [Nintendo DS] Unova's urban design was inspired by metropolises such as New York, with tall buildings and subway tunnels.

» [Nintendo DS] Gym layouts have become increasingly elaborate in later games – even remade ones like this example gain some new tricks.

» [Nintendo DS] The regions of *Black & White* look more realistic, thanks to less grid-based map design.

device also allowed players to obtain items and catch extra Pokémon.

The fifth Generation of games, launching with *Pokémon Black & White*, was in some ways a radical departure from previous entries in the series. "The main goal with *Black & White* was to make the same experience for existing *Pokémon* fans as well as brand-new players," explains Masuda, "so everyone playing the game would experience the same surprises and joy." In practice, this meant that for the first time in the series, the only Pokémon players could encounter were the new ones. It was a welcome change for fans who had experienced over a decade of caverns filled with Zubats and Geodudes, and older Pokémon once again became available after the Elite Four were beaten.

Other improvements were also seen. The new Unova region, an urban area inspired by the state of New York, was the best-looking yet thanks to improved 3D visuals and map designs that were no longer constrained to grids as in previous games. Seasons now passed as well as time, though at an accelerated rate of one per month, and Pokémon Contests were replaced with the upgraded Pokémon Musicals. There was also a Pokémon Dream World feature, which enabled Pokémon to be sent to the internet to obtain otherwise unobtainable creatures.

Over 15 million copies of *Pokémon Black & White* were sold following the games' release in 2010, marking another success and ensuring the production of the now-traditional enhanced version. However, one more surprising break with tradition was left: a traditionally numbered sequel. "With *Black & White*, a lot of things from a story perspective were left unfinished, some of which were done on purpose. A lot of the staff really wanted to revisit those and tie up some of the loose ends," Masuda recalls. "I remember at the time a lot of people were expecting a *Pokémon Grey* to come out, but I knew originally that I wanted to put out two versions for the game that came after *Black* & *White*, as we had a lot of ideas we wanted to implement with that – two versions, we'd set the story two years later, and with various other elements of 'two' we thought we'd put that in the name." The games boasted greater differences than previous enhanced versions, with a substantially different story and new locations.

» [Nintendo 3DS] Old Pokémon like Mewtwo were updated for the first time in years, thanks to Mega Evolutions.

> "We really like to focus on creating incentive for people to meet up with each other in real life"
>
> Junichi Masuda

Pokémon Black 2 & White 2 were the swan song of the DS, which had already been superseded by the 3DS when they were released in 2012. Nintendo's new handheld saw its first major *Pokémon* release late in 2013, with *Pokémon X & Y* marking the series' first simultaneous worldwide release. Battles now took place with full 3D visuals of the kind previously seen in console games like *Pokémon Stadium*, and players were finally set free from four-way grid movement. A new Fairy type was also added, in order to balance the previously strong Dragon type.

But the biggest change concerns evolution. "One of the reasons why people like Pokémon is the fact that they evolve, so we wanted to think of a way to make this even more appealing," says Masuda, "so I discussed this with the battle system designers, the graphic designers and we came up with the idea of a Mega Evolution that would take place just during the battle." Previously, Pokémon could only change forms by evolving outside of battle. The new Mega Evolutions require Pokémon to be given Mega Stones to hold and they only happen during battle, reverting once the fight is over. "I really like Charizard, and I also like the Mega Evolutions of Charizard, but if it stayed like that I'd miss the old Charizard," he explains, offering some insight into why the Mega Evolutions are temporary.

» [Nintendo 3DS] *Omega Ruby & Alpha Sapphire* introduced the short-lived Soar mechanic.

While *X & Y* enjoyed decent sales and critical success, they didn't pierce the mainstream like that inaugural wave in the 1990s. 2016, then, was a shot in the arm for the series as it celebrated its 20th anniversary. *Pokémon Go* arrived in June, and caught everyone's hearts. This smartphone game put everyone on the real-world streets as they sought to capture Pokémon in real-world locations thanks to the game's AR technology. Soon after, *Pokémon Sun & Moon* arrived and it felt like Pokémon was experiencing a second Golden Age. These mainline sequels mixed things up a little by adding new 'Z-Moves' that emphasised the bond between Pokémon and Trainer.

Pokémon Sword & Shield followed in 2019, and took advantage of the Nintendo Switch hardware making it the first mainline *Pokémon* game to appear on a home console. These games were plagued with controversy, however, as they were not able to host all 898 Pokémon: the fans called the scandal 'Dexit'. Still, the games are still of the high quality you'd expect from the series, and the new Dynamax feature, which turned your Pokémon into a kaiju, was a hit.

If you've only experienced *Pokémon* passively, it's easy to write the series off as a fad, but this is a flawed perspective – with the original kids now grown up and still playing, the continued sales of the series rest on more than trends. You can see brand loyalty driving fan projects like *Twitch Plays Pokémon*, in which thousands of players collaborated in a chat room to complete *Pokémon Red* on a livestream. The truth is that the *Pokémon* games inspire that loyalty among fans because they're deceptively deep RPGs, with battle systems that have been stretched by dedicated players and multiplayer features that truly bring players together. In the age of online gaming, a game that can still pack players into the same room is a real classic – and that's exactly what *Pokémon* is.

» [Nintendo Switch] *Sword & Shield* let you 'Dynamax' your pals, granting them gigantic new forms.

GENERATION I

1996–1999

KANTO REGION

The first wave of Pokémon blew the world away. Not limited to games, this big bang for the series also ushered in a TV show, manga series, cards and more

This is it – the era that kicked off a 25-year legacy. The first Generation of *Pokémon* was a phenomenon that exploded in Japan and rippled across the world throughout the late 1990s.

Kicking off with the duet of games *Pokémon Red & Green*, the series saw instant popularity in Eastern Asia. Nintendo took note of this wave of hype that was building and decided to surf it all the way to the West. By the time *Pokémon* arrived on our shores in 1998 (US and Australia) and 1999 (Europe), that wave had developed into a mega-media tsunami. The games were revised and updated as *Pokémon Red & Blue*, and along with them came an instant-hit anime show, a playground-dominating trading card game and more merchandise than you could shake a Pikachu tail at.

Knowing it had struck gold, Nintendo doubled down on its *Pokémon* invasion of the world. In the wake of *Red & Blue*, more games followed, including the anime-themed *Pokémon Yellow*, which put Pikachu in a starring role, and the 3D Nintendo 64 battler *Pokémon Stadium*. The franchise resonated with kids and adults alike for a range of reasons, but perhaps most central to it all was a catchy slogan: 'Gotta Catch 'Em All'. It was a perfect encapsulation of what *Pokémon* was about: the games were based around chucking Poké Balls at a menagerie of creatures and enabled you to trade them with your friends. The anime took that mantra and implanted it in its central character's ambition, and those collectable cards just begged to be hoarded by fans.

There were 151 Pokémon originally, all with unique shapes, sizes and abilities, and while some stole hearts almost instantly (we're looking at you, Pikachu), they were diverse enough that everyone could find at least one they could call their favourite.

1996 POKÉMON RED, GREEN & BLUE

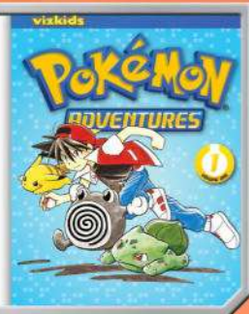
The first *Pokémon* games debuted on Nintendo's Game Boy. Created by Satoshi Tajiri, who was inspired by the console's Link Cable, its RPG battling and collaborative trading was a hit with gamers. Its art, music and gameplay inspired an entire franchise, and even after 25 years this iconic creature-catcher still holds up.

1996 POKÉMON TRADING CARD GAME

If you grew up in the first wave of Poké-fever, you'll remember the cards: they were *everywhere*. The art was great, and the game itself offered cerebral complexity but was still easy to pick up and understand. Today, the TCG is still one of the most respected games in the genre and shows no signs of slowing down.

1997 POKÉMON ADVENTURES

This manga series kicked off with '*Red, Green & Blue Chapter*' and was inspired by the Game Boy games. Penned by Hidenori Kusaka, it follows the adventures of rivals Red and Blue, who are joined by Green, a quick-witted female Trainer. *Adventures* still soldiers on today, with the latest series focusing on *Sword & Shield*.



1998 POKÉMON THE SERIES

In the late 90s and early 00s, it felt like no one could escape the allure of *that* catchy title theme tune. This anime was a stone-cold hit that dominated Saturday mornings and followed the adventures of Ash, Brock, Misty and Pikachu in a more supercharged retelling of the events seen in the games.

1998 POKÉMON YELLOW

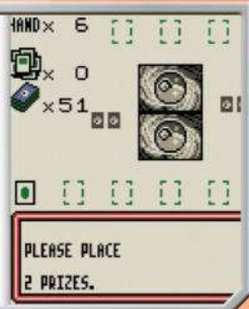
A year after the *Red & Blue* lit up Game Boy screens in the West, this revised edition arrived. Featuring updated in-game sprite artwork and a spiritual connection to the anime series, *Pokémon Yellow* places Pikachu in the foreground. In this game, your electro-mouse buddy follows you around and becomes your friend along your epic journey.

1996 POKÉMON STADIUM

The Game Boy games were great, but they didn't capture what was happening in videogames at the time. 2D graphics were on their way out and 3D was the next big thing. This battler for the Nintendo 64 enabled Trainers to place their Pokémon in show-stopping 3D battles. *Stadium* wasn't as a big hit as the handheld titles, but it was still epic.

1998 POKÉMON TCG (GAME BOY)

Those trading cards were pretty expensive if you wanted to collect them all or just enjoy all the fruits the game had to offer. So this cost-effective Game Boy title was ideal for those who wanted to get lost in the strategy of the TCG, offering on-the-go battles in a neat, understandable and presentable way.



1998 POKÉMON SNAP

Fighting and catching monsters was key to *Pokémon*, but that wasn't what it was *all* about. These were wild creatures, after all, and this more humane look at the series sought to offer an alternative experience. This first-person safari on the N64 let you ride around and take pictures of your favourite Pokémon. Sublime snaps earned you the highest scores.

1998 POKÉMON PIKACHU

What do you get when you cross *Pokémon* with those insanely popular Tamagotchi toys of the 90s? This must-have accessory, that's what! This Pikachu-themed device doubled as a pedometer, letting you build up 'Watts' as you strolled about your day-to-day life. These Watts could then be spent on gifts for your electric buddy or gambled away.

1999 SUPER SMASH BROS

Pokémon's popularity was further established by Pikachu appearing in this Nintendo hall of fame fighting game. Duking it out alongside Mario, Link and Samus, the *Pokémon* mascot had an edge over his rivals due to his small size, quick speed and thunderbolt-infused powers. More and more Pokémon would appear in this popular brawling series.

POKÉDEX 001-151

Today, the original 151 Pokémon are iconic. Debuting in Japan in 1996 and then across the world by the end of 1999, this initial Pokédex of Pocket Monsters is near and dear to many gamers' hearts. Everyone who played the games dearly defended their choice of starter (one of either Bulbasaur, Charmander or Squirtle), many remember combing Viridian Forest for a sighting of a rare Pikachu, and only the Pokémon Masters amongst us had what it took to seek out and capture the powerful Mewtwo.

The DNA of every Generation can be traced back to these forebears: the trio of Grass, Fire and Water for your starter, the rodents and birds you encounter on the first steps of your journey, the fast-evolving bugs, all the way to the powerful dragons encountered towards the end of your adventure; it was all established here.

The anime made stars out of the likes of Pikachu, Pidgeotto, Geodude, Starmie, Arbok, Koffing and Meowth as aspiring Trainers sought to mimic their favourite characters from the cartoon series. Meanwhile, rumours spread across playgrounds on how to encounter the elusive Mew: did you have to use Surf to get behind the SS Anne? Or did you have to use Strength on a truck to make it appear? The truth is that you had to go to a special event to unlock the mythic creature.

While later Generations would address the balancing issues this initial roster had – Psychic-type Pokémon more or less ruled the roost in the original games – the Pokémon of *Red*, *Green*, *Blue* and *Yellow* will forever be the brave pioneers. In more recent games, they've been handled with the utmost respect and care, and for good reason: they're royalty.

001 BULBASAUR 002 IVYSAUR 003 VENUSAUR 004 CHARMANDER

005 CHARMELEON 006 CHARIZARD 007 SQUIRTLE 008 WARTORTLE

009 BLASTOISE 010 CATERPIE 011 METAPOD 012 BUTTERFREE

013 WEEDLE 014 KAKUNA 015 BEEDRILL 016 PIDGEY

017 PIDGEOTTO 018 PIDGEOT 019 RATTATA 020 RATICATE

021 SPEAROW 022 FEAROW 023 EKANS 024 ARBOK

025 PIKACHU 026 RAICHU 027 SANDSHREW 028 SANDSLASH 029 NIDORAN♀ 030 NIDORINA 031 NIDOQUEEN 032 NIDORAN♂ 033 NIDORINO

034 NIDOKING 035 CLEFAIRY 036 CLEFABLE 037 VULPIX 038 NINETALES 039 JIGGLYPUFF 040 WIGGLYTUFF 041 ZUBAT 042 GOLBAT

043 ODDISH 044 GLOOM 045 VILEPLUME 046 PARAS 047 PARASECT 048 VENONAT 049 VENOMOTH

050 DIGLETT 051 DUGTRIO 052 MEOWTH 053 PERSIAN 054 PSYDUCK 055 GOLDUCK 056 MANKEY

057 PRIMEAPE 058 GROWLITHE 059 ARCANINE 060 POLIWAG 061 POLIWHIRL 062 POLIWRATH 063 ABRA 064 KADABRA 065 ALAKAZAM

DID YOU KNOW?

Nidoking is a favourite for anime rivals. Both Gary and Paul have one in Ash's adventures, and Jimmy's nemesis is briefly shown to have one, too.

066 MACHOP

067 MACHOKE

068 MACHAMP

069 BELLSPROUT

070 WEEPINBELL

071 VICTREEBEL

DID YOU KNOW?

According to artist Ken Sugimori, Rhydon was the first ever Pokémon to be designed. Early concept art and an 'index number' of 001 help support this claim.

"The DNA of every generation can be traced back to these forebears"

072 TANTACOOL

073 TENTACRUEL

074 GEODUDE

075 GRAVELER

076 GOLEM

077 PONYTA

078 RAPIDASH

079 SLOWPOKE

080 SLOWBRO

081 MAGNEMITE

082 MAGNETON

083 FARFETCH'D

084 DODUO

085 DODRIO

086 SEEL

087 DEWGONG

088 GRIMER

089 MUK

090 SHELLDER

091 CLOYSTER

092 GASTLY

093 HAUNTER

094 GENGAR

095 ONIX

096 DROWZEE

097 HYPNO

098 KRABBY

099 KINGLER

100 VOLTORB

101 ELECTRODE

102 EXEGGCUTE

103 EXEGGUTOR

104 CUBONE

105 MAROWAK

106 HITMONLEE

107 HITMONCHAN

108 LICKITUNG

109 KOFFING

110 WEEZING

111 RHYHORN

112 RHYDON

113 CHANSEY

114 TANGELA

115 KANGASKHAN

116 HORSEA

117 SEADRA

118 GOLDEEN

119 SEAKING

120 STARYU

121 STARMIE

122 MR MIME

123 SCYTHER

124 JYNX

125 ELECTABUZZ

126 MAGMAR

127 PINSIR

128 TAUROS

129 MAGIKARP

130 GYARADOS

131 LAPRAS

132 DITTO

133 EEVEE

134 VAPOREON

135 JOLTEON

136 FLAREON

137 PORYGON

138 OMANYTE

139 OMASTAR

140 KABUTO

141 KABUTOPS

142 AERODACTYL

143 SNORLAX

144 ARTICUNO

145 ZAPDOS

146 MOLTRES

147 DRATINI

148 DRAGONAIR

149 DRAGONITE

150 MEWTWO

151 MEW

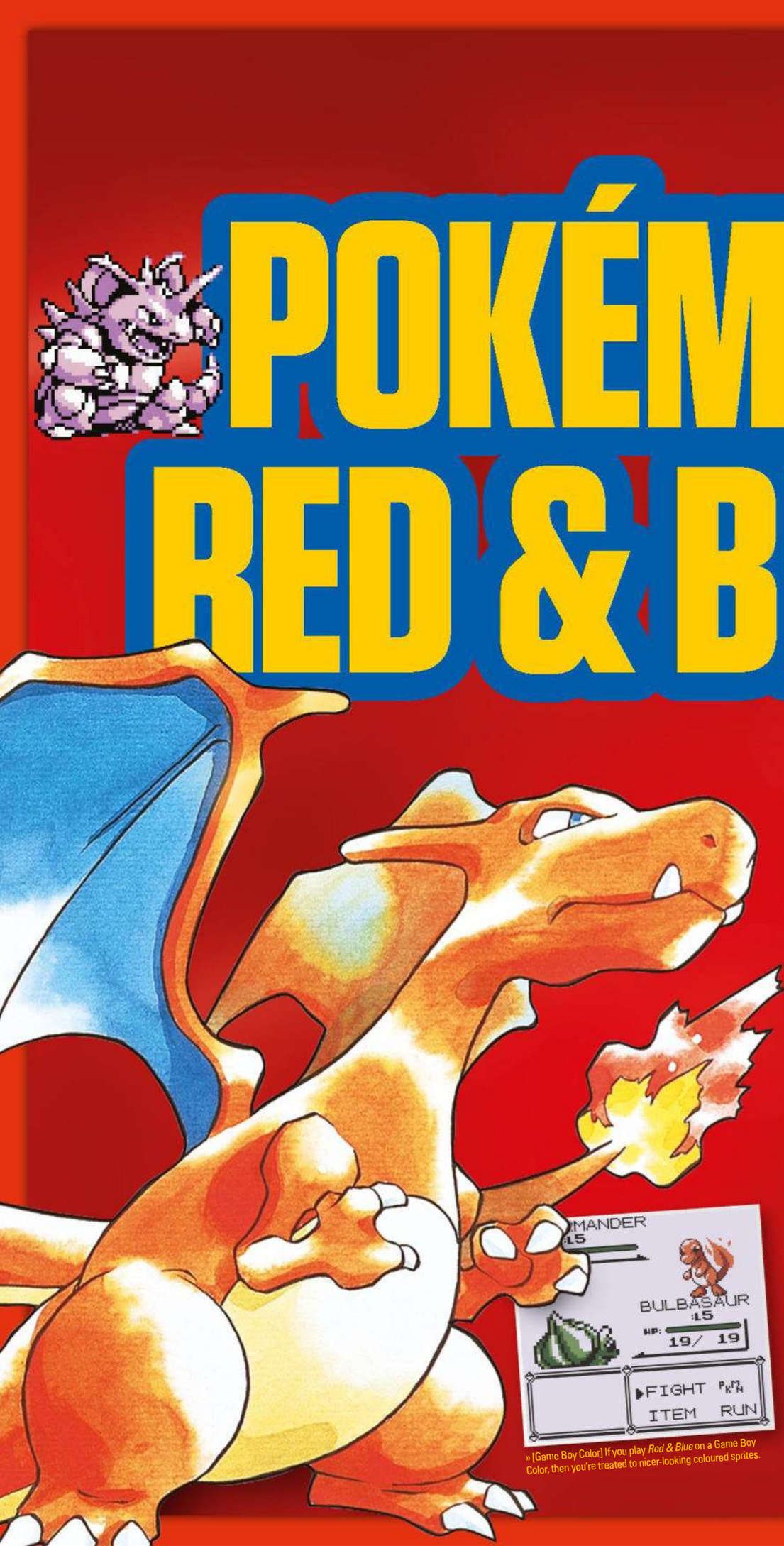
POKÉMON RED & BLUE

Not just a gaming phenomenon but a multimedia one, Pokémon exploded in the late Nineties and is still going strong. Grab your Pokédex and get ready to document the hatching, training and evolution of the franchise

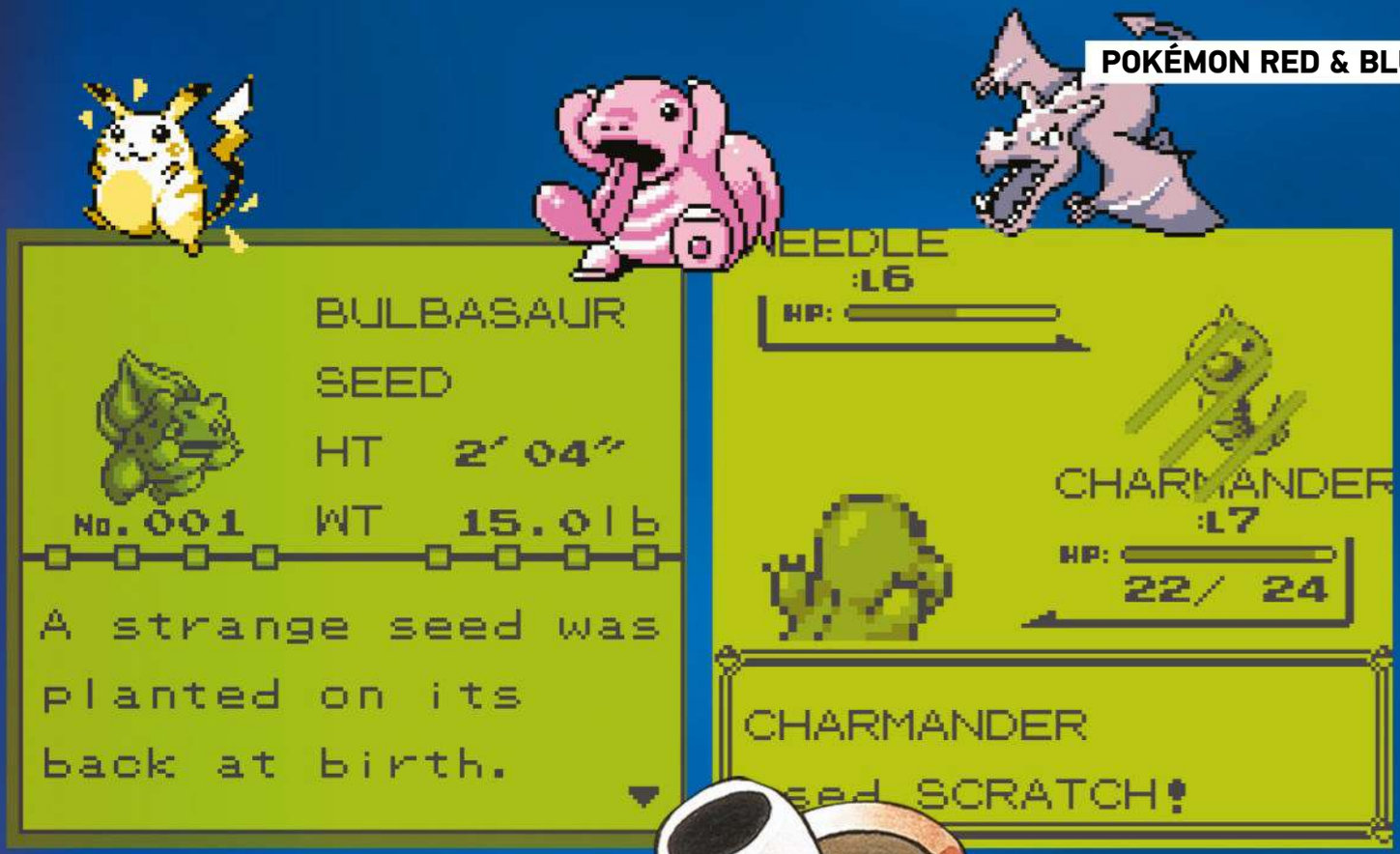
Words by Luke Albigés

Well, do you? No need to play coy – *you know what we're talking about.* Do you want to be the very best? Like no one ever was? The thing about *Pokémon's* many elements is that they're all interconnected, and just seeing screenshots or the logo is often enough to send that opening G power chord ringing out in your head, to evoke visions of Ash turning his cap backwards in the anime or to remind you of that shiny Charizard card you just couldn't get for love nor money back in the day. *Pokémon* launched on a worldwide scale not just as a videogame but as a multimedia offensive. Supported by a TV show, merchandise and other products following the huge success of its original Japanese launch, there was just no way it could fail. It was *everywhere* and in the late Nineties, you could barely move without seeing Pikachu's beaming little face somewhere.

But while that might have been the start of the phenomenon as we know it, our story begins

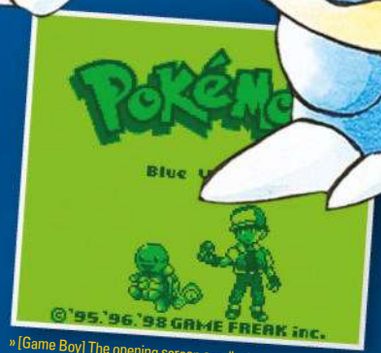


» [Game Boy Color] If you play *Red & Blue* on a Game Boy Color, then you're treated to nicer-looking coloured sprites.



» [Game Boy] If we have one complaint about *Pokémon* battles it is that they are fairly static affairs to watch.

earlier. Well, a lot earlier – all the way back in 1990, in fact, or even *earlier* if you want to track the origins of the most important people behind the franchise. "Mr [Satoshi] Tajiri was the founder of Game Freak and I was a friend of his when I was a student," recalls veteran Game Freak artist Ken Sugimori, the art director and character designer on pretty much all of the games and who has been responsible for official art assets. "We used to play videogames together and that's how we started this company – Mr Tajiri started a company and I joined. Back in 1983, Mr Tajiri started selling this little booklet for ¥200 and it was sold only in very specialist bookstores. It talked about strategies for arcade games because, at the time, there were no home consoles. A few people would visit these stores and see the book, and I was one of them. As we talked, we became friends and discussed how arcade games were often very similar – if we were developing them, what would we



» [Game Boy] The opening screen scrolls through all of the *Pokémon* in the game. Gotta catch 'em all!

JUST THE START

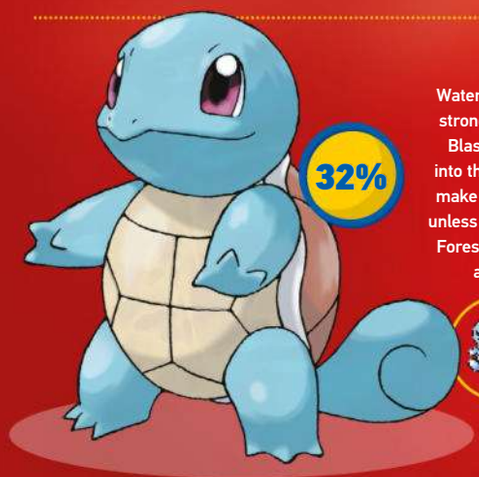
"Who was your first Pokémon?" we asked Retro Gamer readers, and this is what they said...

Bulbasaur

We're surprised this leafy little dude didn't fare better, if we're honest – it can make short work of the first two Gyms and its unique split typing gave it a strong set of options in battle. It also evolves quickest of the three starters, reaching its blooming awesome final stage at Level 32 rather than Level 36, although its reliance on status moves may put off those who just want to bang their heads against opponents.

Charmander

While we're not entirely surprised that He Who Would Be Charizard came out on top in our poll, picking the Fire type as your starter is actually the hardest option as it's weak to both Rock and Water, the types used by Brock and Misty in the first two Gyms. Still, with the highest attack power of the three, it's hard to argue that the Charmander line isn't a powerhouse once you overcome that first hurdle.



Squirtle

Water types have something of a history of being strong defensive options in *Pokémon* games and Blastoise – Squirtle's final evolution – also fits into this category. As such, it's not always easy to make headway (plus you're likely to stall at Misty unless you've bagged yourself a Pikachu in Viridian Forest), but Squirtle's depiction in the anime was always going to make it a fan favourite.

do differently? When we started, some of the readers were programmers and they had the skills and access to the hardware – that's how we started in producing videogames. Then Mr Masuda joined and our first game was *Quinty.*" *Quinty,* or *Mendel Palace* as you might know it, was a simple action-puzzle game released for the NES in 1989, its completion heralding the start of something much bigger, much more ambitious in scale, something that we know today as *Pokémon.* The vision started out small, originally targeting a creature count of around 50 monsters but with that number growing steadily as new ideas were hatched and improved hardware and coding techniques emerged around them. In fact, it sounds as though the team always had more ideas than would be possible to fit into the memory capacity of a Game Boy cartridge. "From the inception of the idea to the completion of *Red & Blue* took a total of about six years, so a long time!" smiles current producer Junichi Masuda, whose involvement on earlier titles was mainly in coding and penning the music of the original games, later taking on directorial and production duties on every mainline release. "We started by creating loads of different Pokémon designs, then we reduced that down to the favourite 150. That took a lot of effort. After that, once we were happy with our designs, we started working on the moves they could each use. This process probably accounted for around three of those six years. It was quite the task! There wasn't an initial plan of which Pokémon would get which moves – we designed the Pokémon then designed the moves, then decided which would fit well together as a gradual process."

Masuda goes on to confirm our suspicions that the team was dreaming far bigger than what a cartridge could accommodate, but it wasn't just a question of storage – it was a case of the ideas being beyond the realms of what the Game Boy hardware could do. "It was difficult. The thing we wanted to focus on at the start was communication and trading but it was difficult to do that as we could only transfer small amounts of data between two consoles," he explains. "Communication itself

» [Game Boy Color] Game Freak threw in nods to the real world as in-jokes, these Easter Eggs would persist throughout the series.

> **"The thing we wanted to focus on at the start was communication"**
> Junichi Masuda

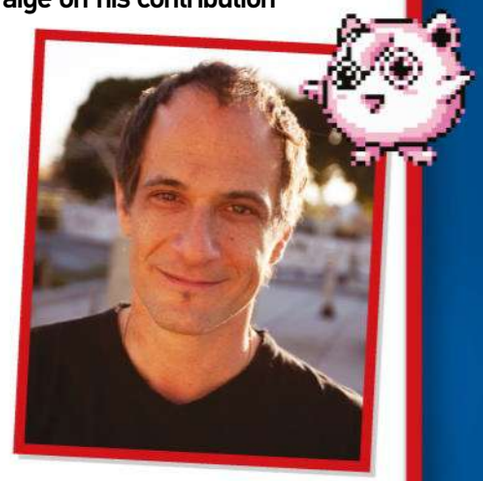
» [Game Boy] Red is about to tackle one of the most difficult conundrums in all of gaming: which starter to pick?

was a big challenge – the technology just wasn't there but we really wanted to do it, so we fought to get it in there. That was an overriding theme – it was a fight against capacity, a fight against what we could fit onto the cartridge. We had designed these 150-odd Pokémon to get in as well. But then we had the problem of movement, so we came up with the idea of the map tiles being the things that moved while the character was animated in place. With these ideas, we found ways to squeeze as much in as we possibly could. I like the Game Boy as a machine but trying to work with all these challenges and make a game that anyone could get into and enjoy was difficult."

Bear in mind that we're still talking about the original Japanese releases of *Red & Green* at this point – localisation hadn't even been considered, and the studio ran into some serious issues when tasked with preparing the game for release outside of Japan. "Originally, it was kind of based on how people feel about and view different colours. The clearest split for us was between red and green but when we started thinking about abroad, it was clear that wasn't the case. In America in particular, it's red and blue that are considered 'opposites', if you will," Masuda reveals, although there were somewhat more pressing issues standing in the way of taking the game abroad, which is what led to the gap of over two-and-a-half years between Japanese release and US launch, not to mention another year to reach Europe. "With the capacity problems mentioned earlier, one thing that we found is that English takes up more space on the cart than Japanese. We had no room! Everything was

LIKE NO ONE EVER WAS

Pokémon theme singer Jason Paige on his contribution to the series' success



How did you come to land the gig performing the original *Pokémon* theme?
It was one of 100 sessions a year that I did for various clients. I had worked for this music house before and as always sang my face off for the demo session. Soon after, we recorded a few changes that eventually were approved for the show. Shortly after the success of the TV show, the album *2.B.A.Master* was recorded when the full version of the theme song appeared, along with *Viridian City*.

Was everything set in stone when you came to record it, or were you able to add any personal flourishes?
Every session involves a collaboration between singer and producers, writers and the client to find the best delivery. In the session, I sang multiple versions of the line 'gotta catch 'em all' with many melodies, giving them a variety of choices. I riffed out in the bridge and augmented some lines to amplify emotion. Though I didn't get credit as a writer, I believe everyone in the room is responsible for the product.

Were you aware of the brand at the time, or given any source material to get a feel for it?
I was aware of the brand through some news articles. And we had examples of the Japanese TV show to watch and catch the vibe.

Did you have any idea how huge *Pokémon* would become, and how iconic the theme would go on to be?
Every session is a roll of the dice hoping that the effort results in the most happiness for the most people. Often there are other indicators like celebrity involvement, big producers, writers, networks that promise to make a product big and it doesn't go anywhere. I've learned to be in the moment – serve the creative task at hand and move on to the next one. Water the seed and wait for the fruits to appear. And they're still coming off of these seeds planted years ago.

Would you describe yourself of a fan of *Pokémon*? Do you play/enjoy the games, and indeed videogames in general?
I was an arcade kid playing all of the old-school games. *Space Invaders*, *Missile Command* Donkey *Kong*, *Q*bert*, *Night Driver*. And at home, I had Atari, Intellivision and Coleco games and now I am a *Pokémon Go* player and fan. It far surpasses my childhood arcade games. Its multiple choices and outcomes are way more exciting than the single path games of my youth. There are no right answers of how to be the very best. Each individual has a unique path to be that master. Just as each *Pokémon* has a unique path to its most evolved state.

How do you feel the theme sits among the rest of your portfolio?
It's right at home with the *Lego Mania* theme song that I wrote mid-Nineties and other popular jingles like the Pepto Bismol *Nausea Heartburn Indigestion* anthem. Subway's *Eat Fresh*, Mountain Dew's *Bohemian Rhapsody* and others are right in line with it. And with the addition of the new *Pokémon Go* theme song available at bit.ly/pokegotheme – the perfect companion for the next generation of players and *Pokémon* lovers. I also do magic and balloon sculpture so kids have many reasons to love me. *Pokémon* makes people happy and helps them expand their imaginations. I have a portfolio of work that seeks to enhance the imagination as well through sharing my unique truth and voice.

Finally, anything you'd like to add about your involvement with *Pokémon*?
I believe *Pokémon* to be a game that enables critical thinking as people are challenged to develop unique strategies to excel that they then can share with other players. These lessons easily transfer to their own lives. As new technologies like AR are integrated, the game and brand will adapt for even greater adventures. I can't wait to see what future technologies are added. And the updates should make it more exciting as well, adding more functionality and interactivity between players. It's all so incredible on a physical level as it demands movement not just through neighbourhoods but through entire regions. It's also made quite an impact on children's health, getting them out into the world, increasing learning for kids with autism and adding much social value surrounding its explosion.

EVOLUTION TRACKER

Each new game or Generation in the Pokémon series has brought with it significant changes and improvements. We take a look at the first 20 years of innovation

GENERATION I

RED/GREEN/BLUE (1996)
YELLOW (1998)

■ *Pokémon* was released in Japan for the first time in 1996 and proved immensely popular. Despite the games' protracted development, there were still several major bugs and glitches, many of which are ironed out with a third *Blue* version arriving later in the year. This would also update visuals and audio, providing the basis for the international release as *Red & Blue* that rolled out between 1998 and 1999. Another revision, *Yellow*, emerged slightly later, the game modified a little to be more in line with the plot, events and style of the anime.

GENERATION II

GOLD/SILVER (1999)
CRYSTAL (2000)

■ A lazy sequel would have been easy to do, but instead, Game Freak iterated on everything that made the first game stand out. Two new types were introduced – Dark and Steel – in an attempt to rebalance existing ones, while the shift to a real-time system that governed Pokémon and NPC availability was incredible. It also saw the debut of shiny Pokémon with variant colours, pre-evolutions of existing creatures, held items for use during battle, genders and breeding, as well as splitting the Special stat into attack and defence values in line with physical stats.

GENERATION III

RUBY/SAPPHIRE (2002), **EMERALD** (2004)
FIRERED/LEAFGREEN (2004)

■ This Gen brought in many staples of the modern *Pokémon* game – Abilities added passive traits to each Pokémon, Natures altered base stats and Double Battles allowed for two-on-two encounters, plus Contests gave a non-battle aspect for pacifists. It also saw a shake-up to the way each Pokémon's potential was calculated, marking the shift to the IV system still used to this day. *Emerald* put a real focus on post-game content with the excellent Battle Frontier, while *FireRed & LeafGreen* brought the original games up to date with these more complex new systems.

» [GBA] *Pokémon Red & Blue* received full remakes for the Game Box Advance.

» [Game Boy] Pokémon Centers are a staple of the series, offering free medical care for all.

▶ so full on that cartridge and there was little space to implement English at the time we created it. So we had a lot of memory problems to solve – things like changing Pokémon names and even the name entry screen, which was all designed in Japanese. To change that to accommodate English was really difficult and something we hadn't considered when first designing the game. We really had to spend a lot of time working on all of this."

Some of this could be seen in the game at the time, with character limits on menu terms, character, creature and item names and even a few attacks. Space, both on the screen and on the cart itself, was at a premium, hence these unusually short chunks of text, as seen elsewhere in the game actually, as Masuda highlights. "Another example is the Pokédex. In the original Japanese versions, you just had one screen and everything was displayed there whereas in the US and European versions, it had to be changed to have two screens with the names and details of the Pokémon. Doing all these great changes took a long time, so that was what contributed to the delay. We never expected things to be so popular abroad, either – we had no idea this would be such a phenomenon so that was really amazing. But yes, it took a long time to make all the changes needed to get the game into different markets."

After all this extra work, *Red & Blue* released in the US towards the end of 1998. With the anime, the trading card game and more toys games and other assorted tat with the *Pokémon* logo slapped on it releasing alongside it, the buzz was huge and with no European launch date so much as hinted at by Nintendo at the time, would-be Trainers would have to go out of their way to grab import copies of the game – some indie game stores even imported these in bulk to sell through at a premium. "Back at school, a friend of mine had brought back *Pokémon* from America, where he had gone on holiday," recalls Joe Merrick, webmaster of fansite Serebii.net. "It hadn't been released here, though the anime was running on Sky and so when he showed the game, I was intrigued, watched the anime and pestered my mother to import the game."

Surrounded as it was by a hype machine on a peerless scale, you might think that this wasn't a matter of quality – for those who weren't fans, the choppy, low-budget animation of the TV show and hoards of cheap collectible junk certainly could have suggested as much, at least. Despite its seemingly low production values, the anime series was entertaining in its own way, luring in new fans with its colourful characters and easy-to-follow stories, but the games have always been superb.

GENERATION IV

DIAMOND/PEARL (2006), **PLATINUM** (2008)
HEARTGOLD/SOULSILVER (2009)

■ The major change ushered in by this Generation was the physical/special split, where move power would be governed by the Attack or Special Attack stat on a case-by-case basis. The jump to DS hardware also allowed for other improvements, such as 3D environments and contextual use of the touchscreen, not to mention true online functionality for the first time. *Platinum* iterated upon this further, while remakes *HeartGold* and *SoulSilver* brought the second-Generation games up to date with all the new features of the current mainline games.

GENERATION V

BLACK/WHITE (2010)
BLACK 2/WHITE 2 (2012)

■ Quality of life was order of the day here, and we're thankful for it today. Primary alterations included the removal of usage caps on TMs, a freeform Elite Four structure and not having to worry about the effects of status conditions such as Poison outside of battle, while new battle modes like Triple and Rotation Battles brought in even more new ways to play. Online play was also improved and Global Link for trade and battle really added to the package. It's the only Generation where we've seen direct numbered sequels, too.

GENERATION VI

X/Y (2013)
ALPHA SAPPHIRE/OMEGA RUBY (2014)

■ Another leap to more powerful hardware meant another big set of changes, with the death of four-directional movement and the introduction of full 3D environments being chief among them. A new type – Fairy – was also added, the first since the second Generation. Greater visibility on previously-hidden stats and values was another nice quality of life improvement, while Mega Evolution updated existing Pokémon with new, more powerful versions during battle, something that was taken even further in the third-Generation remakes that followed.

> **"It took a long time to make all the changes needed to get the game into different markets"**
> Junichi Masuda

"I think the quality had to be there," muses Merrick. "Without it, people wouldn't have felt encouraged to play the game. While *Red & Blue* were a bit buggy, they had a solid foundation, and were complete fun to play causing a lot of people to jump in. However, the factor of the anime and cards also had a huge impact to the reach of *Pokémon*. Many people didn't play the games and just focused on the cartoon or the cards, but like the games, the quality definitely had to be there for it to take off."

But take off it sure as hell did, the multi-limbed approach meaning that there was always something going on in the world of *Pokémon* – game development may be time-consuming but when you've got new TV episodes dropping, trading card sets being released, toy lines coming out and Arceus-knows what else helping to fill the gaps between the mainline videogame releases, it's easy to maintain a high-profile media presence. "We do have various staff involved in different things and we always think about these when developing a game," confirms Masuda. "We really want to think about how we can develop beyond the game and widen things once it's finished. For the card game in particular, we've got Creatures Inc working on the game itself and we discuss with them how best we can expand on the game there and how the new Pokémon we're creating might fit in with their plans." He goes on to explain the difficulty in such coordination between multiple teams and companies, especially when game release dates can't be easily altered. "As we develop the game, we get the TV, TCG and animation teams in to play it so that they have a better idea of what the world, the characters and the Pokémon are like," adds Sugimori. "We're all creating the characters and the settings together so that they're consistent across movies, games and trading cards."

As was to be expected, sequels to *Red & Blue* came thick and fast, but not before Game Freak could establish something that would go on to become almost traditional for *Pokémon* releases – a third game to complement the original pair of releases, originally in the form of *Yellow* which bridged the gaps between *Red & Blue* versions. *Crystal*, *Emerald* and *Platinum* all filled similar roles in their respective Generations, although it stopped there – *Black & White* didn't exactly lend themselves ▶

A NEW DAWN

An exciting new Pokémon game is on the horizon...

The mainline* Pokémon *games are all pretty similar to one another: you assume the role of a budding Trainer and challenge eight Gym Leaders to compete in the Pokémon League. However, Game Freak has unveiled a new interpretation for the franchise.* Pokémon Legends: Arceus *takes us back to ancient times, to a Sinnoh region that's only just finding its feet. It looks to be open world in nature, and has more than a little* Breath Of The Wild *about it. This one will be a while off, arriving in 2022, but it'll be sure to be worth the wait.

SCIENCE OF POKÉMON

Raising the perfect Pokémon – there are myriad factors at work under the hood and true masters will need to be on top of all of them

IVs

Short for Individual Values, these hidden stats dictate the potential of a Pokémon. While randomly generated on capture, these values are a lot easier to manipulate via breeding, with parent Pokémon passing on a set number of these values to its offspring, which can be increased by having one breeding partner hold the Destiny Knot item. Chain breeding, while time-consuming, can therefore lead to hatchlings with perfect stats.

Natures

While breeding for great IVs, you'll also want to make sure you end up with a Nature that is beneficial to the Pokémon in question without hurting its other stats too much. Alakazam, for instance, can happily roll with a Modest nature, boosting Special Attack in exchange for a cut to its already-awful Attack. A 10% buff to a beneficial stat is huge and there's almost always another than can be sacrificed to get it, meaning the neutral Natures are rarely the way to go.

EVs

It's Effort Values this time, referring to the stat boosts granted by battling against different types of Pokémon. Every opponent defeated adds one or more points to a stat, with every four points granting a one-point boost to that stat at Level 100. This isn't infinite, mind – there's a cap at 510 points and 255 to any given stat, allowing for up to 63 points to be added to stats of your choosing or a broader spread of smaller boosts.

Moves

While you might think attacks will be the last thing to think about, that's not always the case. Certain moves can only be learned via breeding – and in some cases complex strings of chain-breeding across multiple species – which can add yet another variable into the mix. For the most part, TMs and tutors can be used to supplement 'natural' moves and get the perfect results, but there will be some instances where breeding for Egg Moves is the only way to get the attacks you want.

Abilities

With each Pokémon having between one and three passive Abilities, getting the right one is important, if not crucial depending on the creature in question. In some case the difference is negligible or there is only one option in the first place, and that makes life a little easier. But for others, the optimal Ability is the difference between competitive viability and storage box filler.

Held Items

Nearly there now. One last thing to consider is which item each Pokémon on your team should hold. These will often tie into existing strengths and game plans, although many of the outliers also serve as viable options on the right Pokémon – switch in a Rocky Helmet Ferrothorn against a Mega Kangaskhan and you'll see what we mean. Choice items, ironically, lock you into only the first move used while offering a bonus to Attack, Special Attack or Speed but this requires a moveset tailored around it.

Team Balance

You'll need more than one great Pokémon if you *really* want to be the best, and synergy is important. You need to ensure that as many weaknesses are covered as possible, all major threats are checked with a counter and support Pokémon are on-hand to give a helping hand. Aim to pack one defensive and offensive Pokémon for special and physical attacks, leaving you two spots on the team to cover weakness and support.

> **"If you added like 300 or so new monsters, that'd just be too many"**
> Ken Sugimori

▶ to the naming conventions of this trend and got direct sequels instead, while *X & Y* were long rumoured to get the trilogy treatment with *Z*, although all the stuff that has emerged that follows Legendary Pokémon Zygarde instead found its way into the seventh-Generation releases, *Sun & Moon*.

Each game, while still rooted in the core structure used in *Red & Blue*, has made great strides in terms of improving quality of life for players, which can make it hard to go back to those older games after being spoiled by so many minor improvements in more recent ones. "I look back on them fondly, for sure, but replaying them is a tricky proposition," Merrick tells us in discussion of returning to the original games today. "So often when I go back to play them, so many of the modern conveniences in it are just not there and make playing a slog. For example, in *Pokémon Red, Blue* and *Yellow*, you had no idea what a move did in-game unless you had an external guide. Sometimes playing the old games without the conveniences and features of modern games just causes me to think, 'How did we play these games?' Once I erase that from my mind, though, I can still enjoy and play through them happily."

Even then, it's not just these minor convenience tweaks, with each new Generation expanding the strategic aspect of the game, not least with every new Generation bringing with it a whole new selection of Pokémon. "The reason why there are about 100 Pokémon added per game is not that we can't come up with the ideas, especially when we have new staff – everyone can come up with unique ideas," Sugimori explains. "The number is set by the duration of the project. Plus, if you added like 300 or so new monsters, that'd just be too many – we have to think of the balance of

» [Game Boy] We all named our rival stupid names, right? Here our character takes on the dreaded Doobrie.

» [Game Boy Color] Sprites were redrawn for the *Yellow* edition of the game, in order to bring the designs in line with the anime and artwork.

battles." The same is true of introducing new types into the mix, which is why only three new ones have been added since launch. "By adding even one more type, it makes the gameplay more complicated so when we did that, we had to really look into the battle balance," Sugimori tells us. "With new moves, there's an infinite combination. If we can solve that problem, we can always add more types – it's not impossible."

Having been on board since the very beginning, Merrick is as well-placed to discuss the significance of the series as anyone else you might care to mention – he has dealt with the franchise in all its guises on a pretty much daily basis, with a weekly workload that is pretty staggering for a fan project. "Sometimes it's as little as five hours, others it is pretty much 155 hours," he laughs. "It all depends on what is going on in the franchise. As time has gone on, not only have I focused more on the quality of the site, but more stuff is happening in *Pokémon*. In past years, I would typically have a lot of times where I had nothing to do; as I have a policy of never skipping more than one calendar day in a row on the news updates, it got tricky to a point of having to contrive reasons to update. Now, though, I rarely have this issue."

There's so much to love about *Pokémon* that it saddens us to hear the blinkered views of those who base their opinion of the franchise on the colourful promotional material and frankly ropey cartoon that emerged while it was still young enough to be considered a fad; before the franchise had even had a chance to prove itself and *long* before it had evolved into one of the complex RPG series made. "People think that *Pokémon* is a game for children but I believe that's a misunderstanding," says Sugimori, and we're inclined to agree – look beyond the presentation around it, peer deeper into its near-bottomless strategic complexities and you'll find an RPG deserving of far more respect and credit than it often gets. But while some can be harder to convince of the series' merits, those who are comfortably on the Pokémon Express make up an expansive player bases that spans every age group and demographic imaginable, as you probably saw when *Pokémon Go* brought fans of all ages out of the woodwork. "The community is by far my favourite thing about *Pokémon*," Merrick tells us. "Aside from a few elements within it, it's one of the friendliest communities around. People go out of their way to help others to find Pokémon. The game by design, has mandated to get people together to battle and trade, and it has continued to do that. There are people alive today because their parents met due to *Pokémon* and that is utterly incredible to me.

"Its impact back in the Nineties was phenomenal," he closes. "It was everywhere and everyone was playing it. I never thought we'd see anything like that again. Then, *Go* happened and once again, *Pokémon* was everywhere. Whether or not we'll see an equal of that again? It's hard to say. The industry is far more volatile these days than it was back in the Nineties, and far more saturated. *Yo-kai Watch*, while huge for a few years in Japan, has diminished and, just hasn't taken off over here. I am unsure if we'll ever see a series permeating so many facets of media at once and be a phenomenon like *Pokémon* ever again." ★

WHO'S THAT POKÉMON?

Are you a Pokémon Professor, or just a chump? Take our test to find out…

Answers: 1. Grimer 2. Magmar 3. Snorlax 4. Articuno 5. Mew

TAKING OVER TELEVISION

For years we've been following the adventures of Ash Ketchum and his loyal companion Pikachu, but where did it all begin?

Words by Rachel Terzian

In 1997, a year after the release of the first two *Pokémon* games in Japan – *Red & Green* – the very first episode of the *Pokémon* anime aired. Enter spirited young Trainer Ash Ketchum (known as Satoshi in the original Japanese dub), an aspiring Pokémon Master who, after turning ten years old, is about to embark on a brand-new adventure – one that would see him travel across the globe, take on some of the world's strongest Trainers, and lead to encounters with hundreds of Pokémon.

Over 1,100 episodes later, the animated series is still going strong, with Ash now having journeyed across every region from the core series of games, earned himself an enviable collection of Gym Badges, caught and trained a diverse variety of Pokémon pals (and even befriended the occasional Legendary Pokémon while he's at it), all while continuing to hone his skills as a Trainer and explore the many fascinating secrets of the Pokémon world.

So how did his journey begin? Looking back to the very first season of the anime, titled *Indigo League* in the English dub and set in the Kanto region like the Generation I games, we meet the young Ash Ketchum for the first time. In Episode 1, '*Pokémon – I Choose You!*', Ash oversleeps on one of the most important days of his life – the day that Professor Oak is to offer him his very first Pokémon. Ash had been restless that night thinking about the difficult choice ahead of him – will he choose Bulbasaur, Charmander or Squirtle? Well, you snooze, you lose, and upon arriving late at Professor Oak's lab, Ash is devastated to find that not only has his childhood rival Gary beaten him to the punch and snagged his choice of starter, but there are no Pokémon left for Ash to take. Well, except for one, that is. Professor Oak is a little reluctant to hand over his last remaining Pokémon to a newbie like Ash – a stubborn, disobedient little Pikachu, who wants no business being anyone's partner, and even refuses to remain inside its Poké Ball.

It was certainly a rocky start to their relationship, with Ash having to pull the reluctant little mouse along by rope and don a pair of rubber gloves to protect him from Pikachu's electric shocks. But when the pair are attacked by a flock of enraged Spearow, Pikachu is hurt, and it's up to Ash to get the two of them to the safety of a Pokémon Center. Inspired by Ash's bravery and determination despite the odds, Pikachu jumps in to save Ash by delivering an incredible, lightning-powered Thunder Shock, and the flock are defeated. After overcoming that fierce challenge together, the two soon form a powerful and unbreakable bond.

Pikachu has remained Ash's loyal companion throughout his many adventures, and due to the popularity of the series, has become ▶

WHERE TO WATCH

Catch up with Ash's adventures on the go with Pokémon TV

Pokémon TV is a free and easily accessible collection of episodes, movies and specials, perfect for when you want to relive the nostalgia of Ash and co's early adventures, or catch up with the latest series. Episodes can be viewed online at watch.Pokémon.com, or via the Pokémon TV app on iOS or Android devices, where you can also download episodes for offline viewing. Being a free service, not all seasons of the anime are available, with episodes and series rotated out over time, so you may need to binge-watch a particular season before you miss your chance! Similarly, movies are only featured for a limited period.

Themed collections of specific episodes from across the eras are also collated for a limited time – for example, a Green Pokémon Galore theme featuring a selection of episodes centred on Grass-type Pokémon. Despite not offering the entire collection of episodes, Pokémon TV is still a great way to have quick and easy access to a fun range of Pokémon adventures.

the franchise's signature mascot, with the adorable yellow critter adorning every type of merchandise imaginable. Ash's Pikachu still prefers not to go inside its Poké Ball, choosing instead to travel on Ash's shoulder, and has also refused to evolve. In the episode '*Electric Shock Showdown*', Ash and Pikachu suffer a humiliating defeat from Gym Leader Lt Surge and his Raichu – but when Pikachu is offered a Thunder Stone to give it the opportunity to evolve, it refuses, determined to defeat Raichu the way it is.

With Ash travelling across all the core regions, from Kanto to Galar, he has encountered his fair share of friends and foes – including key game characters, from Gym Leaders and Elite Four members to Frontier Brains and Champions. Ash's first two travelling companions, Brock and Misty, are Gym Leaders from *Pokémon Red, Green & Blue*, with the anime fleshing out their characters far more than the original games. Ash first meets Water-type Trainer Misty, the Cerulean City Gym Leader, in the very first episode of the series, in which he steals (and subsequently destroys) her bike in order to take his injured Pikachu to the Pokémon Center. Unwilling to simply let that slide, the hot-headed Misty decides to join Ash on his travels until he is able to pay her back. As for Brock, he may be the Pewter City Gym Leader, but in the anime he cares far more about carefully raising his Pokémon than simply battling as a Trainer, and joins the group with the goal to develop his skills as a Pokémon Breeder. He was briefly replaced in the second season of the anime, *Adventures In The Orange Islands*, by a Pokémon-watcher named Tracey, but later returned in the third season, *The Johto Journeys*.

Other notable characters that have joined Ash's travelling party include the likes of May, Dawn and Serena (who also star as protagonists in the main games), as well as Gym Leaders Cilan, Iris and Clemont. May and Dawn (from Hoenn and Sinnoh, respectively) find their calling as Coordinators in Pokémon Contests, in which Pokémon are judged on performance and style rather than strength, and similarly Serena participates in Pokémon Showcases across the Kalos region.

And wherever Ash and his companions go, you can be sure that a certain Machiavellian trio aren't too far behind, cooking up a new scheme to steal Pikachu and any other rare Pokémon they come across… not that they've had much success, mind. Loyal Team Rocket members Jessie, James and their talking Meowth have had a slight obsession with Ash's remarkable Pikachu ever since Episode 2, '*Pokémon Emergency*', in which their attempt to steal Pokémon from Viridian City's Pokémon Center was soon thwarted by a powerful Thunder Shock attack. After that defeat, they vow to make it their mission to capture Pikachu for their boss Giovanni, who they are desperate to impress. Since that day, they've continued to follow Ash and his friends (known collectively by the Team Rocket trio as simply 'the twerps') across every region – concocting devious schemes and even building all manner of giant, thunderproof mechs in an attempt to best them – but have nevertheless always failed to succeed. You have to admire their perseverance, though – and we can still recite their infamous motto to this day.

> **"And wherever Ash and his companions go, you can be sure that a certain trio aren't too far behind"**

Despite being a nuisance, Team Rocket are certainly the least of our heroes' problems when there are all-powerful, godlike Legendary Pokémon threatening the balance of the universe. In the franchise's first foray onto the big screen, *Pokémon: The First Movie* (released in Japan in 1998 and North America in 1999), Ash and his friends are challenged to a battle by the powerful man-made Pokémon, Mewtwo, and soon find themselves in the midst of a dangerous war between it and its counterpart, Mew. After Mewtwo creates an army of aggressive clone Pokémon in an attempt to prove that they're stronger than those raised by Trainers, Ash risks his own life to prove that senseless fighting isn't the answer. There have since been a total of 23 animated *Pokémon* films, most requiring Ash and his team to use their powers of teamwork to prevent worldwide destruction. From Ash discovering that he is the literal Chosen One required to restore harmony to the world's elements in *The Power Of One*, to confronting the gods of time and space in *The Rise Of Darkrai*, Ash, Pikachu and pals have saved the world from imminent calamity a remarkable number of times.

Ash has caught and trained an eclectic mix of Pokémon throughout his journeys, including the likes of a powerful yet mischievous Charizard; the adorable Rowlet that would much rather sleep than battle; an entire herd of 30 Tauros; and even a shiny Pokémon, Noctowl. Only Pikachu has remained by Ash's side throughout

» Water-type Gym Leader Misty is always happy to put Ash in his place when his recklessness gets the group into trouble.

» A special seven-episode miniseries, *Pokémon: Twilight Wings*, premiered in 2020 on YouTube, set in the Galar region and focusing on *Sword & Shield*'s main characters.

» Team Rocket provide most of the comic relief for the series, and sometimes you can't help but root for them and their hilariously ambitious plans.

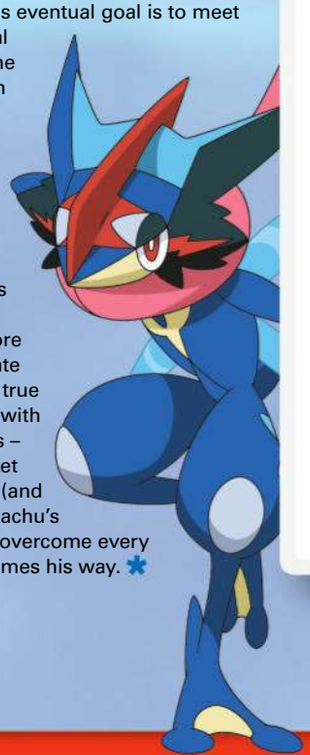
» Ash has certainly befriended his fair share of Legendary/Mythical Pokémon throughout his many adventures.

every adventure, with Ash often starting his Pokémon team afresh when travelling to a new region, sending his team of captured 'mon over to Professor Oak to look after. Ash has always cared deeply for every Pokémon he adds to his team, prioritising close bonds of friendship over solely honing their battle strengths. Despite Ash starting his journey as a complete beginner, with no training experience and barely any knowledge of how to effectively battle, his unfailing trust in his Pokémon buddies has been key to helping him grow stronger as a Trainer, and form a close connection to the Pokémon he encounters. In the case of his Greninja, which he raised from a Froakie that he caught at the start of the *XY* series, Ash's powerful bond with his Pokémon led to the creation of a special, previously unseen form. This was later dubbed the 'Ash-Greninja', a combination of Trainer and Pokémon in perfect sync, enabling Greninja to change into a powerful new variant in battle, in a similar vein to Mega Evolution.

Following the *XY* series was *Sun & Moon*. Much like how the *Sun & Moon* videogames, set in the Alola region, were a departure from tradition – featuring an 'Island Trial' system rather than Gym Battles – the *Sun & Moon* series also took the anime in a completely new direction. Featuring a distinctly new, cartoony aesthetic, the series diverged from its usual formula that had remained mostly unchanged for years. Instead of setting off on a long journey across the region, Ash joins a Pokémon School run by Professor Kukui and attended by key characters from the games, including Lillie and Trial Captains Mallow, Lana, Kiawe and Sophocles. But that's not to say Ash doesn't continue to train and improve his battle skills, and when Professor Kukui decides to launch a new Pokémon League in Alola, Ash takes everything he's learned across all his adventures and, for the very first time since his journey began, is finally able to win the esteemed title of Champion.

The latest series, *Pokémon Journeys*, also takes the anime down a different yet exciting path, with Ash and his new friend Goh travelling across the entire world as part of their roles as research fellows at Cerise Laboratory. Ash's new ambition is to succeed in the World Coronation Series tournament, while Goh is far more interested in capturing Pokémon to complete his Pokédex – he's certainly taking that 'Gotta Catch 'Em All' slogan seriously, with Goh even managing to collect all Bug-type Kanto Pokémon in a single episode. His eventual goal is to meet and catch the Mythical Pokémon Mew, who he had an encounter with as a child.

Ash Ketchum has certainly come a long way since his early days as a newbie Trainer catching his very first Pokémon and learning the ropes of battle. He may still have a way to go before he achieves his ultimate dream of becoming a true Pokémon Master, but with a team of loyal friends – both human and Pocket Monster – by his side (and on his shoulder, in Pikachu's case), he'll be able to overcome every new challenge that comes his way. ✱



TAKING OVER TELEVISION

UNMISSABLE ADVENTURES

A selection of series you definitely don't want to miss

INDIGO LEAGUE

■ The 52-episode original series features some of the most iconic moments in the show – including Ash rescuing an abandoned Charmander that later evolves into a formidable Charizard; an eerie encounter with Psychic-type Gym Leader Sabrina; the introduction of the Squirtle Squad; and an emotional farewell to Butterfree.

XY / XYZ SERIES

■ In this series, Ash adventures across the Kalos region, with his pals Serena, Clemont and Bonnie in tow. They find and befriend a mysterious Zygarde Core that also holds the key to the sinister plans of the nefariously stylish Team Flare, and Ash and his Greninja awaken the powerful 'Ash-Greninja' form.

SUN & MOON

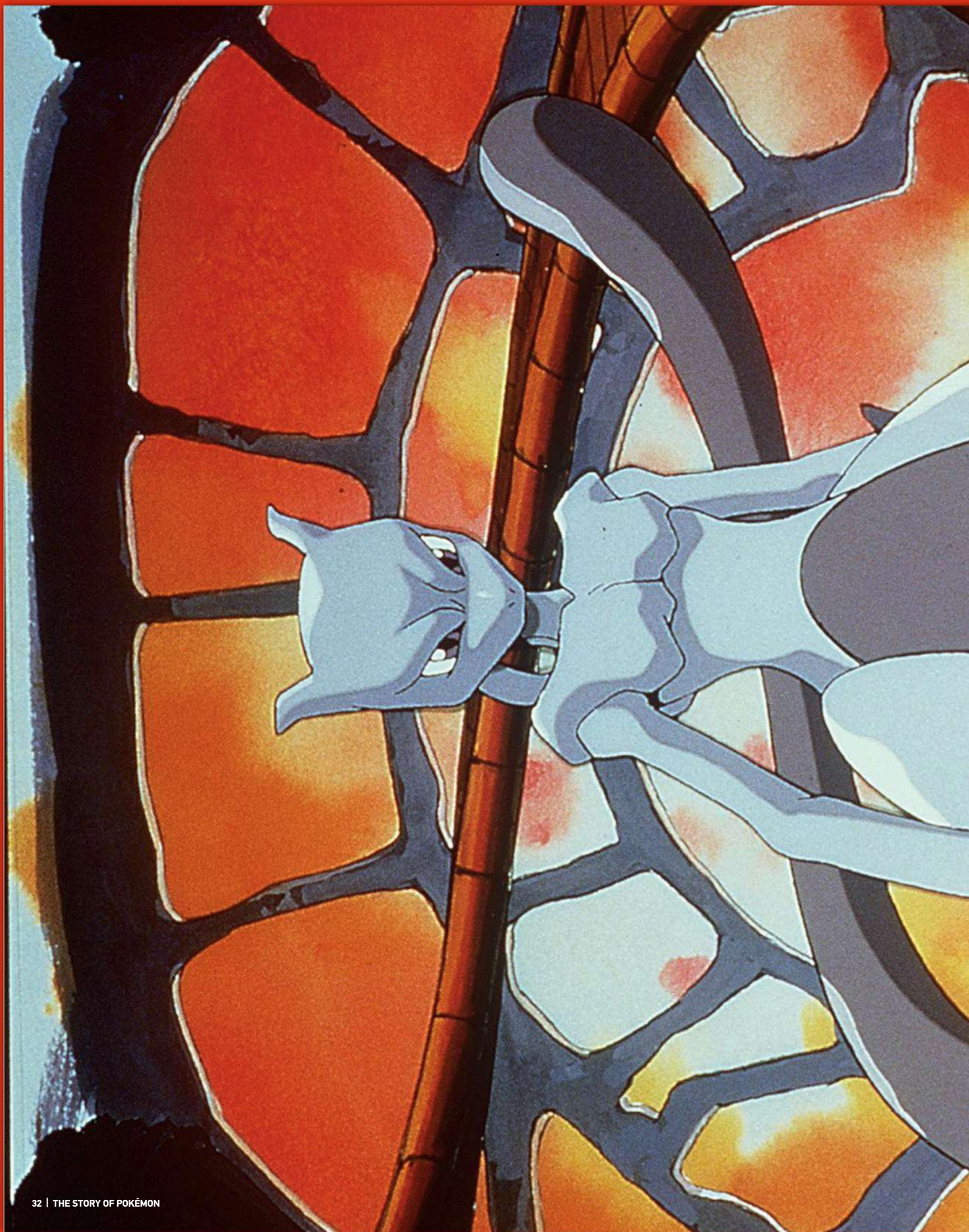
■ Ash attends a Pokémon School run by Professor Kukui. In the *Sun & Moon: Ultra Legends* season, Ash and his classmates take on important missions as members of the Ultra Guardians, uncovering the secrets of the Ultra Beasts. Throughout the series, Team Rocket are hilariously pursued by an unrelenting Bewear.

POKÉMON JOURNEYS

■ The latest series, taking Ash and Goh across every region – including Galar, in which Ash meets Champion Leon and aims to rise in the ranks of a worldwide tournament in order to fight him. In Episode 1 '*Enter Pikachu!*', we're given the heartwarming backstory to Ash's best friend, back when he was just a Pichu.

POKÉMON ORIGINS

■ A special four-episode miniseries, *Pokémon Origins* is set in Kanto and is a more faithful adaptation of the first two Pokémon games. Following Pokémon Trainer Red as the lead protagonist and including many game-specific references, the plot diverges in the final episode with the introduction of Mega Evolution.



POKÉMON THE FIRST MOVIE: MEWTWO STRIKES BACK

Pokémon's silver screen debut arrived at the height of Poké-fever

The *Pokémon* anime was a worldwide success. Fans were belting out the theme tune and reciting the Poké Rap at every opportunity they could. During the height of the global Poké-fever phenomenon, the creators of the TV series put pen to paper and mapped out *Pokémon*'s very first movie. *Mewtwo Strikes Back* arrived in Japan in 1998, and then the rest of the world a year later. 4Kids took over the English-language dub, while theatres organised a flurry of promotional material to tie into *Pokémon*'s big-screen debut, including an array of exclusive movie-themed trading cards.

The film delves into the backstory of two of the most mysterious Pokémon from the videogames, Mewtwo and Mew, and follows Ash and co as they receive a mysterious invitation to battle the 'world's greatest Pokémon Trainer', which turns out to be Mewtwo itself. The film was a commercial success and was the biggest opening weekend for a Warner Bros animated film at the time (which was distributing the film in the USA). *Mewtwo Strikes Back* also showed off a tantalising glimpse of a new Pokémon, which was due to appear in the upcoming *Pokémon Gold & Silver* videogames: Donphan, which Ash and his partners battle at the very beginning of the film.

20 years later, *Mewtwo Strikes Back* was remade as the 3D animated film, *Mewtwo Strikes Back – Evolution*. The new film broadly follows the events of the original, however it updates certain story elements and brings in some Pokémon from later Generations.

You can watch the remake on Netflix. If you want to watch the original film, however, you'll have to buy or rent it from Amazon Prime, iTunes or Google Play.

POKÉMON: THE TRADING CARD GAME

How the videogame was turned into one of the biggest collectible card games in the world!

Words by Adam Barnes

For a game that revolves primarily around collecting and battling, it's perhaps no surprise that a collectible card game (CCG) was one of the additional spin-off outlets that the franchise ultimately explored after the booming success of the Game Boy videogame. After releasing in 1996, the phenomenal success of *Pokémon* naturally led to a number of interesting avenues, but perhaps none were so well-suited to the original concept as the *Pokémon Trading Card Game*, or *PTCG* as it became known. But actually, the first foray into a physical rendition of 'Gotta Catch 'Em All'' was the Pokémon Carddass 100 Pocket Monster cards, published by Bandai in September 1996 and released only in Japan – just a few months after the original *Red & Green* games had exploded onto the scene. Like any of these sorts of collectible cards and stickers, the Carddass trading cards could be bought either as individuals or as packs of five and could have any of the original 151 Pokémon available from the games inside. Each card featured the original artwork created by *Pokémon* artist Ken Sugimori for the games, were branded with 'Monsters Collection' and detailed a little about the creature in question on the back. It was the closest anyone could get to the thrill of filling out a Pokédex at the time, and with the Poké-craze in full effect it was naturally very popular. Much like the two games it was based on, these trading cards were split into *Red & Green*, with some Pokémon only appearing in one of the two sets. A refreshed third and fourth set were released a year later in 1997, enhanced with more details on the back and updated artwork that depicted each Pokémon's most iconic move.

But these collectible cards were quickly replaced with something much more tantalising

» The Japanese version of the game has different back artwork reflecting that the franchise is called '*Pocket Monsters*' in its home country.

"You would refine your strategies the more you played, realising the strengths and weaknesses of your particular combination of cards"

to Poké-fans only a month after the original set hit the market. Initially *Pokémon The Card Game* released only in Japan, but the concept of buying packs of random mystery cards was the same. The twist, however, was that this time it wasn't just about collecting but also *playing*. Like the Carddass trading cards, the very first release of *PTCG* was based upon the *Red & Green* versions of the original game. However, not all 151 Pokémon were available to collect: this wasn't about owning *every* card to complete a collection just for the sake of it, but rather about building up a 'deck' that you could actually play against other players. The idea was that you would refine your strategies the more you played, realising the strengths and weaknesses of your particular combination of cards to suit your playstyle and adapt it as you go. Until you knew you had every card that was available – and at the time no one could really know at what point they had everything – you likely would've been excited with each new pack purchased simply because of the potential for something new that could dramatically alter the way you wanted to play. Or maybe you'd been thrashed utterly by another player who had a rare Pokémon, and you would stop at nothing until it was yours. This idea of a game built around collectible cards was not a concept created by *Pokémon* – that had been originally conceived by Wizards Of The Coast with *Magic: The Gathering* in 1993 – but it was a relatively new area for the tabletop game industry, and *Pokémon*'s inherent theme of tracking down and collecting monsters to collect and train for battle translated over to a CCG with ease.

WHAT'S THAT POKÉMON (CARD)?

A rundown of the different category of cards and how they're used

Pokémon Cards

Understandably, these are the bread and butter of any match and can be used to build up a team of six Pokémon that you'll swap in and out of combat to defeat your opponent. You'll always have to start with a Basic Pokémon, but once you draw relevant Stage 1 and Stage 2 evolutions, you can enhance their fighting strength.

Energy Cards

These are the cards that you'll use to power your Pokémon and allow them to use their abilities, and they come in either Basic or Special forms. The Basic ones cover the required energy for each of the game's elements, while Special versions can add multiple energies of different types, provide special effects or even heal the Pokémon they're attached to.

ENERGY
Special Energy
Double Dragon Energy
This card can only be attached to Pokémon. This card provides every type of Energy but provides only 2 Energy at a time, only while this card is attached to a Pokémon.
(If this card is attached to anything other than a Pokémon, discard this card.)

TRAINER
SUPPORTER
Wally
Search your deck for a card that evolves from 1 of your Pokémon (excluding Pokémon-EX) and put it onto that Pokémon. (This counts as evolving that Pokémon.) Shuffle your deck afterward. You can use this card during your first turn or on a Pokémon that was put into play this turn.
You may play only 1 Supporter card during your turn (before your attack).

Supporter Cards

Every other card in *PTCG* is classed as a 'Trainer Card', which essentially have some unique effect or special advantage. As the game evolved over the years, however, many of these became their own subclasses, such as Supporter Cards that feature characters from the franchise with unique effects. Only one Supporter card can be played per turn.

Item Cards

This is a type of Trainer Card that depicts the various items that can be used in the *Pokémon* videogames. Their function in the trading card game could be basic stuff like healing items or Poké Balls that enable fast recalls to more complicated and unexpected tools with unique effects like the Super Rod, Professor's Letter or Roller Skates.

TRAINER
ITEM
Mega Turbo
Attach a basic Energy card from your discard pile to 1 of your Mega Evolution Pokémon.
You may play as many Item cards as you like during your turn (before your attack).

TRAINER
STADIUM
Fairy Garden
Each Pokémon that has any Energy attached to it (both yours and your opponent's) has no Retreat Cost.

Stadium Cards

While Supporter Cards are an important subclass of Trainer Cards, these Stadium Cards are generally quite powerful. Only one of these cards can be active on the board at any time and will usually have game-changing effects that are permanent until another Stadium Card is played.

» Like all established trading card games, collectors will pay a handsome price for powerful or rare cards.

The setup of the game itself is a pretty effective reworking of the videogame too. Initially, players can only start a game by placing a 'Basic Pokémon' onto the board – meaning an unevolved Pokémon. Players that have the suitable cards in their hand can then evolve a Pokémon through to higher stages to increase their strength, which is not only a great interpretation for the progress seen in the videogames but also keeps both players on even ground since they won't be free to plop down their strongest card via a lucky first draw. And like the videogame, it's only possible to use six Pokémon in battle, with one active battler and five remaining on the bench until they are swapped in. Each Pokémon card comes with at least one skill and descriptions of how that particular Pokémon can be used, the difference being that they don't have four abilities to make use of, they can't learn new ones or forget ones they don't want, and nor can they be different between cards. A Pikachu card from the very first set will always have 40 base HP, for example, and will always have the moves Gnaw and Thunder Jolt. And there's another pretty big difference between *PTCG* and the videogame too, as you cannot use your Pokémon's attacks endlessly until you run out of PP; instead you must use Energy cards, which can be generic or come in a number of different types to represent the various Pokémon types seen in the videogame. This is where the strategy comes from, since it's not enough to just pick your favourite (or even only the strongest) Pokémon cards. Instead, you need to plan your deck around a strategy that you want to work towards and pick cards that work well together. Say you are particularly focused on making use of the Blastoise card and the Rain Dance power that comes with it; then you'd need to ensure your deck was filled with blue Water Energy cards to maximise the effectiveness of that card. But it wouldn't be enough to only use Water-based cards, though, since much like the videogame there are weaknesses too, and a player using Electric-based cards would ultimately be able to destroy your strategy.

> **"The strategic similarities between PTCG and the Pokémon games are obvious, but it still offered something more"**

The strategic similarities between *PTCG* and the *Pokémon* games are pretty obvious, then, but it still offered something more – or rather something additional – that players of the videogame couldn't get. And since it was much easier for anyone to take part in *PTCG* (you didn't need to own a Game Boy or a friend could just give you their spares), it became equally as popular as the digital version that inspired it. However, it was still some years

» *Pokémon*'s card game enjoys a healthy community and frequently draws in new talent from younger and curious players.

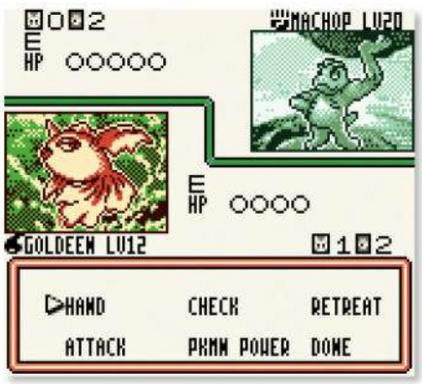
WILD CARDS

Ironically, the Pokémon Trading Card Game also spawned its own videogames too...

POKÉMON TRADING CARD GAME

■ Released in 1998 (Japan) and 2000 (America) on Game Boy Color, this was a digitised version of the card game. It was a fairly basic recreation of the card game but looked quite similar in design and layout to the videogame format, which could admittedly be a little confusing. The same restrictions were in play here, of course, meaning it wasn't possible to use Pokémon from the original 151 Pokédex but rather the more limited roster that appears in those initial card sets, though there were a few cards added that were exclusively available in this game.

There was a simple story to the game that required you to essentially travel the world and take on Gym Leaders (though they were called Club Masters here), but the fact that it allowed you to play against an AI opponent - however basic it may well have been - offered something that couldn't be done with the real-life card game: playing solo.



POKÉMON TRADING CARD GAME ONLINE

■ As technology expanded and the infrastructure for online gaming became more and more prevalent, The Pokémon Company took an opportunity in 2011 to release a digital-only version of its popular CCG. Unlike the earlier Game Boy Color game, this was a complete recreation of the physical tabletop game and would even allow players to purchase virtual card packs to add to a digital collection. While it might not have the same feeling as holding a tangible, physical deck of cards and placing them down against a real-life opponent, the online capabilities of the game meant that now players could compete with anyone around the globe - they weren't restricted to finding players interested in *PTCG* in their local area.

Since it is an online experience, this version of the game has been maintained and updated in line with new Generational releases to ensure that everything that happens with the physical version of the card game also takes place with those who choose to play digitally.

» If you want to win big at tournaments, you'll have to research the strategies that are being used – commonly called 'the meta'.

» The World Championships are a spectacle and include competitive tiers for both the card game and videogames.

before the *Pokémon Trading Card Game* would make it outside of Japan. Wizards Of The Coast published the English-language version of the card game, initially starting with a demo of the game in 1998 that gave players a taste of the CCG. By January 1999, though, the first base set of cards was released, retaining the same gameplay of the card game and introducing – quite literally – a whole new world of players to the *Pokémon*-inspired board game.

P*TCG* brought the competitive aspect of *Pokémon* to the forefront, cutting out the journey to the Elite Four that was the overarching goal of the videogame and instead leveraging similar systems to emphasise the player vs player element in a much more distilled and immediate manner. Unsurprisingly, a competitive scene built up around the card game, which was becoming almost as popular as *Magic: The Gathering*. In 2000, the very first major international tournament took place in Hawaii – the Tropical Mega Battle – which featured 42 players from around the world. And that was just the beginning, since this push on professional competitive play only helped to popularise *PTCG*. Eventually an official Pokémon League was set up, which allowed players from around the globe to become Professors, a title that meant they could arrange local matches for players to play against each other, earn points and ultimately take part in national and international competitions.

By 2003, *Pokémon* had already become a household name, to such an extent that the company that was created solely to handle the franchise – The Pokémon Company – took over publishing rights for *PTCG*. At this point Wizards Of The Coast had already released a number of expansion sets and even an all-new Generational set to tie in with the release of the next videogames in the series, *Pokémon Gold & Silver*, but from 2003 it was all in the hands of The Pokémon Company. Alongside this came new 'Generational' sets each time another entry into the game was released, but this didn't just mean adding in new Pokémon that were also added into the Pokédex of the new games; each time new features and gameplay mechanics were added for players to learn and adapt their strategies too. Sometimes these were built around new concepts introduced into the game franchise, such as new Pokémon types, the ability to have Pokémon holding items or new and updated abilities. Other times they were completely original to the card games, such as EX-variants of previous Pokémon cards that were stronger than their base equivalent.

In any case, each new videogame also means new additions to the card game, and that in itself has kept the game growing. While fans of the videogame are not necessarily players of *PTCG* and vice versa, there is naturally some crossover, and that has helped to build a diehard group of players over the years. In fact, it is often tussling with *Magic: The Gathering* for the top spot in the strategy card game industry, but either way there's no denying that it's a smash success.

Since its release *PTCG* has sold over 30 billion cards, with over 7,000 different cards having been released, and hosted some of the biggest competitive events on the globe. It might be different to the videogames, but it's equally as important to Poké-fans.

GENERATION II

1999–2002

JOHTO REGION

For the first time in Pokémon history, a new roster joined the cast. Meanwhile, an onslaught of new games, anime, merchandise and more confirmed that the Pocket Monsters were here to stay

***Pokémon* had established itself as a monster hit in its worldwide debut, and hot off that success The Pokémon Company wanted to ramp things up.** It already had a game series and spin-offs, a popular anime series and a ridiculous amount of Poké-paraphernalia already in the stores, so it made perfect sense to double down on it all.

The new Generation debuted in Japan in November 1999 with the two mainline videogames, *Gold & Silver*, released for Game Boy and Game Boy Color. These follow-ups placed Trainers in a brand-new region, the Kyoto-inspired land of Johto, and brought in 100 new critters to catch. The games were acclaimed, with praise aimed at the evolution of game mechanics, the two new Pokémon types (Steel and Dark) and the inclusion of Kanto (the setting of the first game).

Meanwhile, while those new games were packing the cartridge slots of Game Boys worldwide, a new *Gold & Silver*-themed anime arc started airing, showcasing new Pokémon like Chikorita, Noctowl and Donphan, and new anime movies such as *Pokémon The Movie 2000* displayed the splendour of Legendary Pokémon such as Lugia (who is also the cover star of *Silver*). More spin-off games followed, such as *Pokémon Puzzle Challenge*, and the trading card game adopted the new 'mon in an array of exciting expansions.

While this second wave of *Pokémon* power wasn't as intense as that initial invasion, it established the franchise as a force that was going to stick around for a while. And with this successful new era, the series had devised a solid winning formula for future Generations: new mainline games featuring a shiny new Pokédex of Pokémon, followed by a deluge of new media starring those critters. It was foolproof, and for better or worse, Nintendo, Game Freak and The Pokémon Company stuck rigidly to it.

1999 POKÉMON GOLD & SILVER

These *Red & Blue* sequels were sublime – they took everything great about the original games and supercharged them. The new art reflected the detailed anime designs, the role-playing gameplay was enhanced with new features like breeding, and for those who were already nostalgic, Kanto was still available to explore.

1999 SEREBII.NET

Today, you can easily find fan communities online for just about anything, however, back in the early 00s the internet was still finding its feet. Serebii.net was one of the first – and best – *Pokémon* fan websites to arrive, offering news, forums and game tips for all who needed them. The website is still running today and is one of the best places to keep up to date.

1999 POKÉMON THE MOVIE 2000

No, don't worry: you haven't missed 1,999 other *Pokémon* movies; this one just capitalised on the fact it was released at the turn of the new millennium. Set just before *The Johto Journeys* anime series, this new film places Ash in the centre of a Legendary Bird-themed crisis that forces him to turn to Lugia for help.

2000 POKÉMON: THE JOHTO JOURNEYS

It makes perfect sense to continue Ash's adventures into the Johto region, right? Well, the heads in charge of the *Pokémon* anime certainly thought so, and almost like clockwork this new era for the series debuted not long after the new games. For this series, Bock returns having being replaced by artist Tracey for a while.

2000 POKÉMON CRYSTAL

This updated version of *Pokémon Gold & Silver* ditched the original Game Boy and debuted exclusively for the enhanced Game Boy Color handheld. This special 'third' version altered the original story ever so slightly to give the Legendary Dog Suicune more of a prominent role, and for the first time ever it allowed you to pick a male or female avatar.

2000 POKÉMON PUZZLE CHALLENGE

Like we saw in the previous Generation, *Pokémon* wasn't afraid to branch out from its RPG roots when it came to games. This puzzle-packed follow-up to the *Pokémon Puzzle League* on the N64 features the new Johto Pocket Monsters as they duke it out in a wonderful, *Tetris Attack*-like offering.

2000 POKÉMON STADIUM 2

Much like the first *Pokémon Stadium*, this N64 follow-up brought 3D battles to television screens, this time offering a packed roster of Johto monsters. It didn't scratch that full RPG itch the handheld games were offering, but as a companion to those games *Stadium 2* was a much-appreciated diversion.

2001 POKÉMON MINI

Okay, this is a wild one: an entire *games console* based on *Pokémon*. The Mini was a teeny-tiny little handheld that had its own miniature cartridge-based games. Predictably, all these titles were based around *Pokémon* one way or another, however, they covered a wide range of genres. Sadly, the console didn't catch on enough for a follow-up.

2001 SUPER SMASH BROS MELEE

Nintendo naturally saw *Pokémon* as a jewel in its crown by this point and continued to give it the star treatment in its cross-franchise battler series. More 'mon were added to the roster this time around, including Mewtwo, Jigglypuff and newcomer Pichu, plus countless collectable *Pokémon*-themed trophies were up for grabs.

2001 POKÉMON CENTER, NEW YORK

As a sign of the series' ever-creeping dominance in popular culture, dedicated *Pokémon* stores started creeping into the West – notably in the Rockefeller Centre in New York City. Already a staple in Japan at this point, Pokémon Centers sold all sorts of *Pocket Monster*-themed merchandise.

POKÉDEX 152-251

The next 100 Pokémon officially arrived with *Pokémon Gold & Silver* in November 1999, however, some of them snuck in before their big debut on Game Boy and Game Boy Color screens. Misty hatched a Togepi egg in the anime episode *Who Gets To Keep Togepi?*, while newcomer character Tracey showed off his Marill in *The Crystal Onix*. Meanwhile, Donphan stormed into action in the movie *Mewtwo Strikes Back* and Snubbull made an appearance in the first Pikachu short film, *Pikachu's Vacation*. These teases at the next wave of Pokémon were tantalising at the time and made it clear that this new roster was designed to live alongside the original 151 monsters and not replace them.

The second Generation of creatures brought in two extra types with them: Dark and Steel. These new flavours of Pokémon were intended to better balance the main games, as in the previous era Psychic-type creatures were seen as perhaps a little *too* strong and needed taking down a peg or two. The two new types were a hit with *Pokémon* fans, and some of the new designs become firm fan favourites – especially the likes of the new Dark Eevee evolution Umbreon and the metallic Scyther successor, Scizor.

Also introduced in this follow-up Generation of 'mon were 'Baby' Pokémon. These were brought in to emphasise the new game mechanic of breeding, which meant that the likes of Pikachu, Clefairy, Jigglypuff and more had adorable pre-evolutions added to their family trees. Baby Pokémon fell by the wayside a bit in later games, but their legacy of offspring inheriting stats and moves can still be felt in modern *Pokémon* titles.

This Generation placed a bigger emphasis on its Legendary-tier Pokémon: Lugia and Ho-oh, both of which starred on the cover art of *Pokémon Silver* and *Pokémon Gold* respectively. The fiery phoenix Ho-oh drew eyes immediately, as eagle-eyed fans spotted that it had appeared in the very first episode of the *Pokémon* anime, while the sea guardian Lugia had its very own movie based around it: *Pokémon The Movie 2000*. Finally, another 'Mythic' Pokémon, Celebi, followed in Mew's footsteps and proved to be a mysterious time-travelling creature that was difficult to pin down.

200 MISDREAVUS
201 UNOWN
202 WOBBUFFET
203 GIRAFARIG
204 PINECO
205 FORRETRESS
206 DUNSPARCE
207 GLIGAR
208 STEELIX
209 SNUBBULL
210 GRANBULL
211 QWILFISH
212 SCIZOR
213 SHUCKLE
214 HERACROSS
215 SNEASEL
216 TEDDIURSA
217 URSARING
218 SLUGMA
219 MAGCARGO
220 SWINUB
221 PILOSWINE
222 CORSOLA
223 REMORAID
224 OCTILLERY
225 DELIBIRD
226 MANTINE
227 SKARMORY
228 HOUNDOUR
229 HOUNDOOM
230 KINGDRA
231 PHANPY
232 DONPHAN
233 PORYGON2
234 STANTLER
235 SMEARGLE
236 TYROGUE
237 HITMONTOP
238 SMOOCHUM
239 ELEKID
240 MAGBY
241 MILTANK
242 BLISSEY
243 RAIKOU
244 ENTEI
245 SUICUNE
246 LARVITAR
247 PUPITAR
248 TYRANITAR
249 LUGIA
250 HO-OH
251 CELEBI

DID YOU KNOW?

Sudowoodo's name is a clever play on words. It means 'pseudo wood', or 'false wood', which makes sense considering its Rock typing.

POKÉMON GOLD, SILVER & CRYSTAL

The Game Boy Color Generation of *Pokémon* would prove to be Game Freak's 'tricky second album' but would cement the RPG brand as an international sensation. Grab your Pokégear, because we're heading to the Johto region

Words by Dom Peppiatt

***Pokémon Gold & Silver* nearly killed Game Freak. The games – promised as more than a mere upgrade to the dual titles that launched them into the mainstream world – were supposed to cement the fledgling franchise in the public's consciousness and carried the responsibility of turning a fad into an enduring pop culture icon.** Game Freak couldn't just trace over the lines of the game that had come before. No – this time the developer needed to come up with a new storyline, a new world, and 100 new species of Pokémon.

That's a tall order, even for a company that was riding on the back of two of the most successful handheld games of all time. To make matters worse, the studio was broke. Game Freak had managed to spend away all of the profits generated by *Pokémon Red & Green/Blue*, but the staff had very little to show for it. By the time designer and composer Junichi Masuda moved onto the project full time, it was massively behind schedule. Game

NEW INNOVATIONS

What Gold & Silver added to Game Freak's original formula

REAL-TIME CLOCK

■ Having a real-time clock and a day/night cycle meant that you felt more involved with the world, whether you were hunting down Pokémon that only appeared on certain days, waking up early to fish for rare Corsola or evolving an Eevee to Espeon or Umbreon, Generation II made your real-life play time matter in-game, too.

BACKWARDS COMPATIBILITY

■ Because *Pokémon Gold, Silver & Crystal* added new stats and traits to Pokémon, trading something from your old game and seeing that it had a personality, or was holding an item, felt really special. It also meant none of your old collection was just sat around on a dusty, unused cart.

HELD ITEMS

■ Whether you're giving a Pokémon a berry to hold so that it heals itself in battle or a special item it can hold when you trade it to make it evolve into something different (like a Metal Coat), Generation II got creative by granting Pokémon the ability to hold items – and it's a mechanic that's persisted ever since.

BREEDING

■ Who would have thought that an inconspicuous little house on Route 34 would be the start of a now-classic *Pokémon* mechanic? Whether you want to breed to get Shiny Pokémon, try for a 'perfect stat' monster, or simply want to put Ditto through its paces in order to get a baby Pokémon, the breeders had you covered.

POKÉGEAR

■ Part watch, part personal assistant but all innovation, the PokéGear was a handy little gadget that allowed you to play the radio, check your map on a whim, or call up other Trainers in order to organise rematches. Each of these useful gimmicks would be upgraded and built on in future mainline games.

"Masuda noted that Iwata was a superstar and an essential cog in the Pokémon Gold & Silver engine"

Freak, at this point, was still almost an enthusiast outfit; Masuda himself has noted that there was no formal 'development style' in place until later in the studio's history, and everything behind these early Game Boy and Game Boy Colour games was slow. Painfully slow.

Pokémon Gold & Silver launched in Japan towards the end of 1999, with the US launch taking place a year later in October 2000, and the European version coming in even later, in Spring 2001. The original plan would have seen the games launch in 1998, acting as a 'new adventure' for players to enjoy once the first series of the anime had wrapped up in Japan, and development on this wholly new adventure had begun immediately after *Pokémon Red & Green* shipped in Japan.

It was grand in its scope: Game Freak knew it could appeal to the obsessive types that would fall in love with its world and announced evolutions for existing Pokémon before practically anything else. It was a hook designed to get players coming back for more; after all, who wouldn't enjoy importing their collections from past games into this shiny, new title? By building on a foundation of what had come before – and setting it in an entirely new region – Game Freak had managed to capture the imagination of the world before the original games had even arrived overseas.

But the runaway success of Game Freak's first foray into the *Pokémon* world shunted things back – the development team had been waylaid thanks to the demand for *Pokémon Stadium* on the Nintendo 64, and international appetite for the games meant a chunk of the studio's resources were tied up in localising the first two games. In the end, *Pokémon Yellow* would launch in the window meant for *Gold & Silver*, and just four programmers were left to work on the bulk of the sequels as the rest of the world was gripped with Poké-mania. Nintendo's juggling of the release schedule brought the studio some time… but not much.

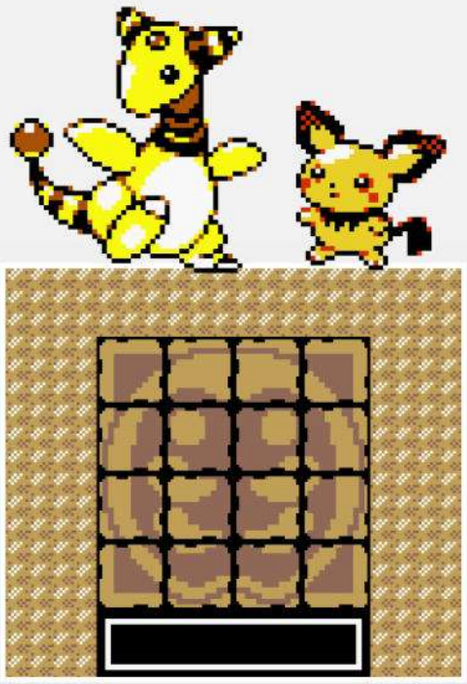
Enter the late Satoru Iwata, president of long-time Nintendo collaborator HAL Laboratory (and future president of Nintendo itself). Masuda noted that Iwata was a superstar and an essential cog in the *Pokémon Gold & Silver* engine. Masuda once claimed that Iwata took a look at the source code the studio had used to develop both *Red & Green/Blue* and *Gold & Silver* and "within days" understood it better than its original writers. Iwata guided the tiny Game Freak team, ripping out the battle logic from the original teams and tidying it up, making it work for the Nintendo 64 *Pokémon* games within a week.

This allowed Masuda and his Game Freak team to focus more on the second Generation of mainline games without distraction from other Nintendo projects. Everything was getting back on track, and Masuda was able to take stock of what *Gold & Silver*, in this prototype setup, actually looked like. It wasn't in the best shape and was still mostly a vague collection of ideas; some new Pokémon designs, some refinements to the battle system and the outline of a new plot.

Masuda found a focal point in the idea of Japan's iconic old towers – the kind you'd find in the

» [Game Boy Color] Generation II introduced Pokémon that liked to hide in trees, which you needed to use Headbutt to catch.

» [Game Boy Color] The Battle Tower marked the start of Game Freak acknowledging the deep competitive potential of the *Pokémon* franchise.



» [Game Boy Color] Solving mysterious puzzles in the Ruins Of Alph would unlock special new Pokémon for you to catch in the depths.

cities of Nara and Kyoto. With this monolithic idea in mind, the team decided to pursue a notably more Japanese style than what the world saw in *Red & Green/Blue*, taking inspiration from Japan's Kansai and Tokai regions. And that may have been the best thing that happened for the second Generation of *Pokémon* games, because the cosy, lived-in setting with its evocative art style and calming, gentle regional music would go on to define *Gold & Silver* more than any other *Pokémon* games in the series' illustrious history.

> **"The game had its theme and its setting, and from there development exploded"**

Revitalised with a sense of direction, Masuda hopped in and out of cabs around Japan's south, talking to drivers about the history of the local landmarks. Eventually, one cabbie would tell him about the To-ji tower in Kyoto – one of two twin towers and the only survivor after its Western sibling had burned down. If you're familiar with the games, you'll know this is effectively what happens in Ecruteak City; the real-life To-ji tower mirroring the game's mythic Bell Tower, home to legendary Pokémon Ho-Oh.

From here, the world of Johto unfurled. Even the game's mythical backstory emanates from Ecruteak; Ho-Oh is said to roost atop the Bell Tower awaiting a Trainer pure in heart, and the Phoenix-inspired Pokémon resurrected the three legendary dogs – Raikou, Entei and Suicune – on the site of the ruined Burned Tower. Fictionally and historically, then, Ecruteak is the heart and soul of *Gold & Silver*.

The game had its theme and its setting, and from there development exploded. The rest of the game started coming together quickly. As the game grew in scope, though, and elements of Japan's rural south quickly started sprawling out into the land we know now as Johto, the Game Freak team were faced with another problem: the game's data was getting too big to fit on a Game Boy Color cartridge.

Once again, Iwata stepped in to help. He managed to create coding compression tools that allowed the game's graphics to be read quicker and more efficiently from the cartridge (a fact that Game Freak would later reference, in-game, in *Pokémon Ultra Sun & Ultra Moon*), meaning the developers could include both Johto and Kanto in *Pokémon Gold & Silver*, as well as a suite of more richly detailed graphics. Even today, *Pokémon Gold & Silver* are the only games released as a pair that feature wholly different sprite art for each game – something that took the version differences *Red & Green/Blue* prided themselves on and extended it to a whole new level.

A new *Pokémon* Generation would be nothing without new Pokémon themselves. Game Freak took a wholly new direction with this Generation, deviating from the dinosaur-inspired, genetic and scientific experimentation-driven approach that had defined so many of the original 151 monsters and opting instead for a much more

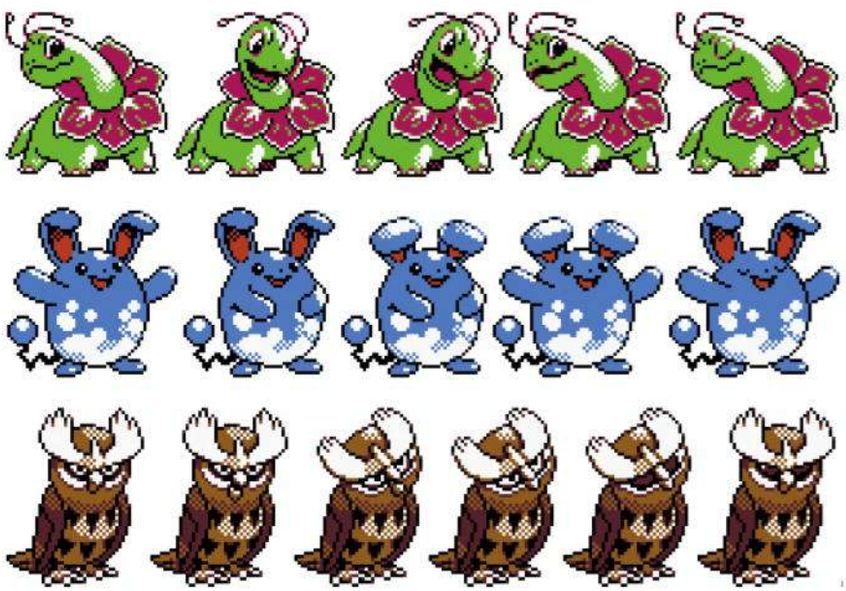
» [Game Boy Color] Your initially unnamed rival would turn out to be the child of the previous Team Rocket leader, Giovanni.

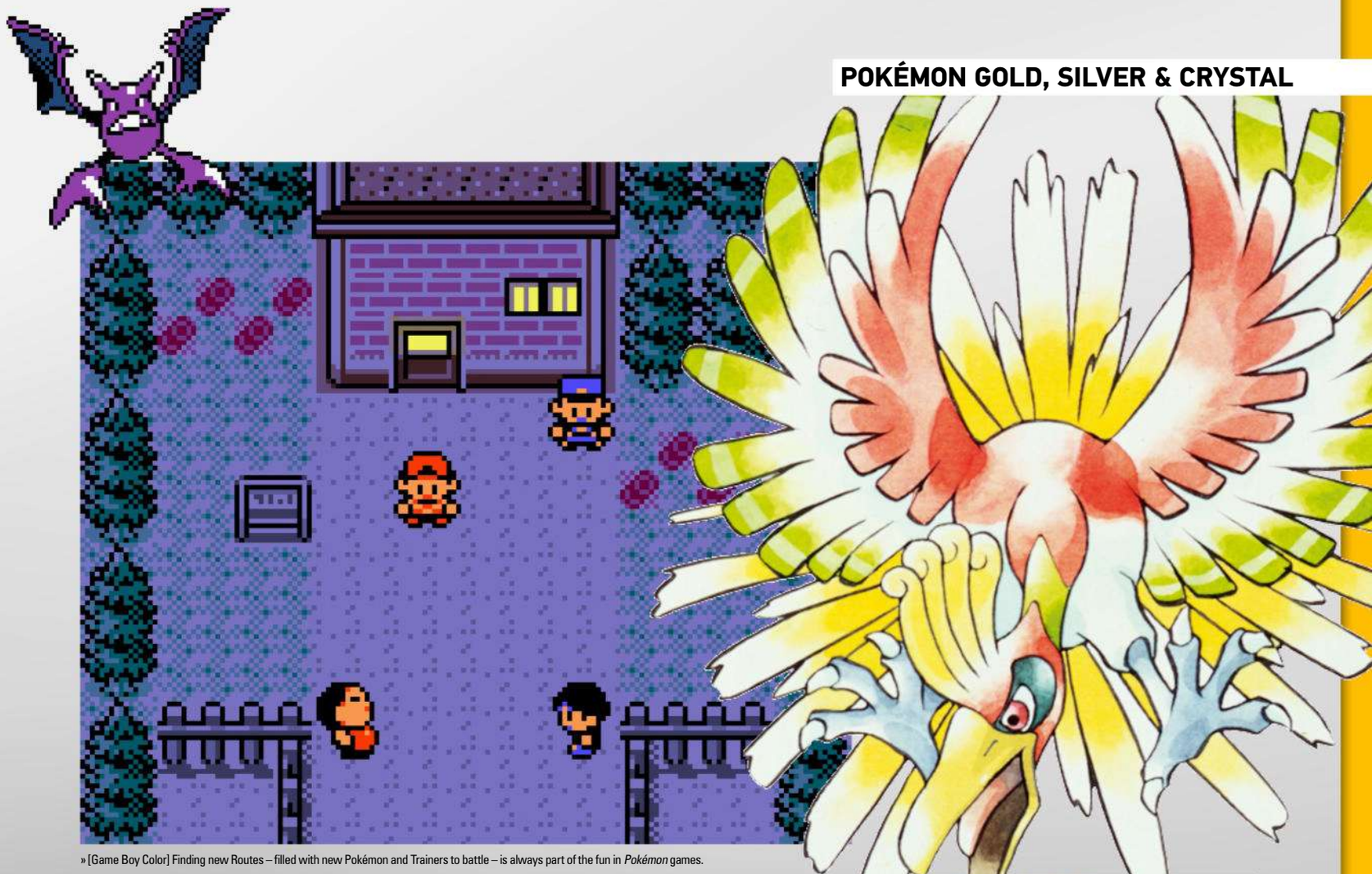
THE SPRITE STUFF

Inside the animated sprites that made their debut in Pokémon Crystal

■ The second you get your first Pokémon in *Pokémon Crystal*, you notice something different; when Pokémon first appear in battle, they move! A little animation occurs that shows off a bit more about its personality. Whether it's one of your starter Pokémon communicating its traits – a leaf-spin from Chikorita, a flicker of the flames from Cyndaquil, a lil' tantrum from Totodile – or a glare from an enemy's Ekans, these little flourishes really served to make the Pokémon in *Crystal* feel like living creatures with their own quirks and mentalities. If you'd ever been confused by a Pokémon and its design (which was often the case with the back sprites of the original Game Boy games), these animations really helped to illustrate what the designers were thinking when they put them together – the little face on Spinarak's back, for instance, made a lot more sense when you saw it frown.

Oddly enough, despite being received well in the 'upper' version that was *Pokémon Crystal*, Game Freak totally skipped out on animated sprites in the following Generation III games *Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire* and *Pokémon FireRed & LeafGreen*, though they would eventually be reintroduced in *Pokémon Emerald*.





» [Game Boy Color] Finding new Routes – filled with new Pokémon and Trainers to battle – is always part of the fun in *Pokémon* games.

natural set of creatures. After all, the company had made a conscious effort to create a more thematic world inspired by the scenic beauty of Japan – it'd be a shame to not populate it with creatures that fit.

Looking through Pokémon 152 to 251 in the Pokédex, you'll see many more creatures inspired by Japanese fauna – bears, owls, deer, dogs, cats, fish and birds make up the bulk of the new roster, and a wealth of bugs joined the ranks, too. Game Freak told its staff to think back to their childhoods to get the inspiration for the 100 new Pokémon the game would include, and the staff's experience with things like scary animals they encountered in the country or while bug-catching would go on to be a big influence as the final roster came together.

To that end, just past the game's first major city (the impressively metropolitan Goldenrod), you'll find National Park. Thanks to Game Freak's inclusion of a new internal clock that could accurately keep up with the date and time you were playing, the team could introduce timed events into the game. This was leveraged in a variety of creative ways, but the most notable would be the player's first real introduction to this newfangled technology. And – because everything is cyclical – it takes the form of a bug-catching contest.

Every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, Trainers eager to fill out their Pokédex and show-off their ball-throwing skills could compete in the contest. Not only was this an activity that taught you day-specific events can net you unique Pokémon (with Scyther and Pinsir being available only here in these games), it was also a fresh new take on *Red & Green/Blue*'s Safari Zone that put the onus on that ever-present tagline 'Gotta Catch 'Em All' once again.

Curious players intrigued by the new day/night mechanic and the seven-day cycle in the game had other fun mysteries to uncover, too. Seven 'Week Siblings' appear throughout Johto's routes, giving players move-enhancing 'Held Items' when spoken to for the first time. Special, rare Pokémon will appear in different locations – the first you're told about being the endangered Lapras that visits Union Cave on Friday evenings. NPCs will appear in shops to give away special items, and barbers will rotate on a shift pattern to give your Pokémon free (or fancy) new hairdos. Trainers will call you up via the Pokégear to demand rematches, where you can see their team level up, evolve and chop and change as you continually engage with them.

If the first *Pokémon* Generation was all about the sense of wonder as you explored a world you knew nothing about, encountering creatures that seemed to operate in their own, fully realised ecosystem, the second Generation was about making all that feel alive in real-time; creating a world that moved in synchronisation with you, that grew and evolved alongside you and your team.

It helps that Game Freak implemented some wide-reaching changes that rounded-out the RPG side of things for the more battle-conscious player. There was more of an incentive to battle than in the previous Generation; a wider move pool, more

» [Game Boy Color] The mythology of Poké Balls would be expanded in *Gold*, *Silver*, & *Crystal* – Apricorns found in the wild could be turned into modified Poké Balls by Azalea City's Kurt.

» [Game Boy Color] There's a lot of history in Johto, and the people in the world are more than happy to fill you in on it all.

varied Pokémon, two new types (Dark and Steel), some added depth thanks to Held Items, and the Special stat being split into Special Attack and Special Defense all refined the battle system and made it a little more approachable for players of all ages thanks to improved UI and menu functions.

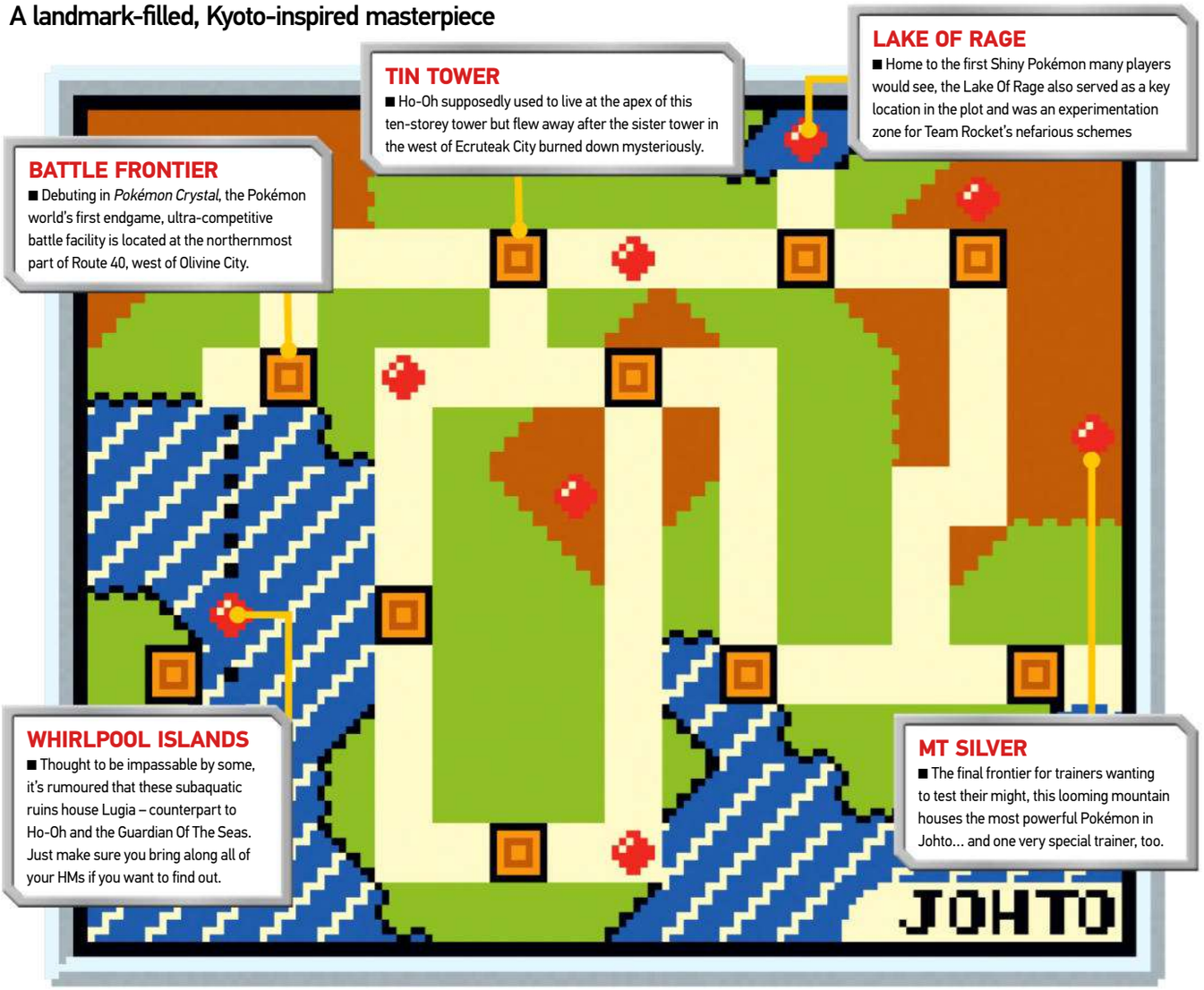
You also had more control over your team than ever before. The overpowered Psychic type and the underpowered Fighting type slotted into the type hierarchy more sensibly thanks to revisions to the type chart and the introduction of Steel and Dark, and more monsters of varying types were introduced to give players wider variety when composing their teams. We even saw the introduction of some gimmick Pokémon – like the offensively useless but defensively stalwart Shuckle – that'd later go on to form the basis of some truly terrifying 'gimmick teams' in global competitions.

The Special stat split drove this point home, too; Pokémon now fit into distinct categories with physical and special attackers and defenders exemplifying the four main builds. Two new semi-mascot Pokémon in 'Eeveelutions' Espeon and Umbreon came to embody this split in-game, too, giving even RPG-phobic players a clear way to see how this new stat setup worked. This split would be the foundation on which later Generations would build on and impacted how Pokémon themselves were conceived in the future too.

Moreover, the sentimental ideals of friendship and love that were corny, tacked-on narrative beats in the first game now had mathematical formulae assigned to them – taking care of your Pokémon, healing them when they were injured, keeping them from fainting, feeding them berries and giving them haircuts all increased a hidden Friendship meter. Kept intentionally vague to promote players treating their Pokémon like pets – not weapons, like your red-haired in-game rival – Friendship affects the evolution of certain Pokémon, the power of Return and Frustration, and how certain NPCs act towards you.

GREETINGS FROM JOHTO

A landmark-filled, Kyoto-inspired masterpiece


TIN TOWER
■ Ho-Oh supposedly used to live at the apex of this ten-storey tower but flew away after the sister tower in the west of Ecruteak City burned down mysteriously.
LAKE OF RAGE
■ Home to the first Shiny Pokémon many players would see, the Lake Of Rage also served as a key location in the plot and was an experimentation zone for Team Rocket's nefarious schemes
BATTLE FRONTIER
■ Debuting in *Pokémon Crystal*, the Pokémon world's first endgame, ultra-competitive battle facility is located at the northernmost part of Route 40, west of Olivine City.
WHIRLPOOL ISLANDS
■ Thought to be impassable by some, it's rumoured that these subaquatic ruins house Lugia – counterpart to Ho-Oh and the Guardian Of The Seas. Just make sure you bring along all of your HMs if you want to find out.
MT SILVER
■ The final frontier for trainers wanting to test their might, this looming mountain houses the most powerful Pokémon in Johto... and one very special trainer, too.
JOHTO

As if concocting a new world, filling it with appropriately designed Pokémon and rewriting the rules of the battle system wasn't enough, Game Freak also catered to replayability, too. By this point, the developers knew that eager Poké-maniacs could work up game files with hundreds of hours in *Red & Green/Blue*… and simply 'catching them all' wouldn't do for a second-Generation game.

Gold & Silver, then, saw the introduction of Shinies: a specific Pokémon with different coloration to what is usual for its species. Incredibly rare (spawning in the wild at a rate of 1/8,192), Shiny Pokémon are more cosmetic badges of honour than anything else, but their appearance in-game – revealed to the player via the Lake of Rage's very own Red Gyarados in a story beat – meant hardcore players had something else to strive for once they'd beaten the returning Elite Four challenge, collected the eight 'bonus' Kanto region's Badges… and found Red.

To this day, many players will reminisce about Red if you ask about the *Pokémon* games' most imposing challenge. Armed with the highest-level Pokémon you'll find in the entire game, the mute protagonist from *Red & Green/Blue* is a nightmare for the unprepared. A diverse team brimming with treacherous moves and healing utility, Red is the perfect challenge to find atop the secret area of Mt Silver – the absolute climax of these two new games that were built around taking the player on a more intense, fleshed-out journey through the world of *Pokémon*.

The battle is a smart piece of pacing from Game Freak and gives you a great perspective on just how far the series has come from atop the heights of Mt Silver. It shows you, the player that's battled through Kanto and Johto over two Generations of games, the progress you've made. You stand face-to-face with this reflection of your player character and face down an array of iconic Pokémon that acted as mascots for the entire *Pokémon* brand. If you've been paying attention – if you've taken on-board all the newly minted lessons about types, stat changes, friendship, Held Items, and everything else this Generation has introduced – you may just stand a chance. In finding and beating Red, the story of the foundational, world-changing Game Boy-era of *Pokémon* comes full circle and draws to a close, setting the scene for the next Generation and some of the biggest changes to the series we'll ever see in one leap.

POKÉMON MINI

A whole console dedicated to Pokémon games? No, you're not dreaming – Nintendo really did do that

Words by Nick Thorpe

» **MANUFACTURER:** Nintendo » **YEAR:** 2001

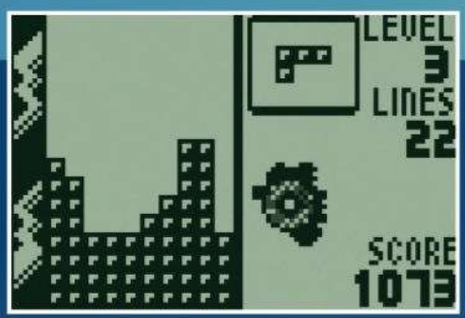
Nintendo has been famous for its smaller consoles ever since the introduction of the original Game Boy back in 1990, but when creating the only gaming platform fully dedicated to *Pokémon*, it really decided to embrace the 'Pocket' part of *Pocket Monsters*. When it comes to traditional consoles with interchangeable games, the Pokémon Mini is the smallest that Nintendo has ever made. The diminutive device is 7.4cm tall, 5.8cm wide and 2.3cm deep, and weighs just 70g with a cartridge and battery inserted – and that single AAA battery will give you up to 60 hours of gameplay. Despite that, it manages to pack in some surprising features, including rumble and a simple shake detector, and even an infrared port for wireless multiplayer.

Of course, you don't get all of that cool stuff inside such a small package without some sort of compromise. The Pokémon Mini's tiny black-and-white LCD screen can only display 96x64 pixels, and the 8-bit CPU and 4KB RAM place some real limitations which mean that the Pokémon Mini can only play relatively simple games. But while they may not be the most complex of titles, they're usually high-quality games that even have room for a little stylistic flair, where the display technology allows for it – though the less said about the flat beeps that the system emits as so-called 'music', the better.

The Pokémon Mini was first introduced to North American players in November 2001, with Japan getting it a month later and Europe having to wait until March 2002. Unfortunately, the cute little device didn't get a whole lot in the way of long-term support. American players only ever received four of the console's games – *Pokémon Party Mini*, *Pokémon Pinball Mini*, *Pokémon Puzzle Collection* and *Pokémon Zany Cards*. European fans got one more, *Pokémon Tetris*. But over in Japan, five more regional exclusive games were released over the course of 2002, making for a grand total of ten official releases.

So it's fair to say that you won't have so much to play if you decide to pick up the Pokémon Mini. But you'll probably enjoy what you do play, and you'll have the pleasure of owning a very cool piece of both Nintendo and *Pokémon* history too.

» [Pokémon Mini] A single AAA battery would provide around 60 hours of continuous gameplay – that's impressive!



» [Pokémon Mini] *Pokémon Tetris* offered the famous block-dropping puzzling fun on the teeny-tiny handheld.

» [Pokémon Mini] Sure, it didn't have a colour display, but that only adds to the console's retro appeal today.

> **“The diminutive device is 7.4cm tall, 5.8cm wide and 2.3cm deep, and weighs just 70g”**

SMALL WONDERS

The Pokémon Mini had ten games to its name, but which ones were the best?

POKÉMON PARTY MINI

This collection of minigames carries the spirit of the extras in games like *Pokémon Stadium*, with six events – Rocket Start, Baseline Judge, Ricochet Dribble, Dance Delight, Boxing Frenzy and the two-player Speedy Fake Out.

POKÉMON PUZZLE COLLECTION

If you need some brainteasers to keep you occupied, this little collection should do the trick. You're initially presented with three types of puzzle, Motion Puzzle, Shadow Puzzle and Rescue Mission, and can unlock Power On.

POKÉMON TETRIS

Complete four lines in this classic puzzle game and you'll catch a Pokémon! There's a lot going on here, including normal endless play, 20 Line and Pyramid modes, the choice to use four or five block pieces, and even multiplayer.

POKÉMON RACE MINI

Pikachu has to race through short platform stages against other favourite Pokémon, using abilities like air dashing, wall jumps, climbing and even swimming. This game is a Japanese exclusive, but is well worth tracking down.

GENERATION III

2002–2006

HOENN REGION

The third era of Pokémon was an exciting time. The new games jumped onto the more powerful Game Boy Advance and GameCube, and the media machine ramped up with them

This Generation marks the beginning of The Pokémon Company looking to mix things up with its game series, to mixed results. In a departure from the previous eras, the new *Ruby & Sapphire* games were set on a new continent, Hoenn, with no route back to Johto or Kanto. This new land was populated with a colourful roster of unique creatures, however, this also meant that a large portion of the older Pokémon weren't available for capture straight away. This was later addressed when remakes of the very first *Pokémon* games (*Red & Green*), called *FireRed & LeafGreen* were released in 2004, allowing for the full Pokédex to be collected on Game Boy Advance. In fact, catching 'em all became such an emphasis for the series this Generation that a dedicated storage solution called Pokémon Box was released for GameCube, enabling Trainers to store their hard-earned Pokémon on a memory card.

'More videogames' was very much the theme of this Generation, as the Game Boy Advance and GameCube consoles became hosts to quality titles like the previously mentioned mainline games, a more story-focused *Stadium* experience with *Pokémon Colosseum* and *XD: Gale Of Darkness*, plus the dawn of some new sub-series in *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team & Red Rescue Team* and *Pokémon Ranger.* If you were a gamer and a fan of *Pokémon*, this Generation was heaven.

In the meantime, the merch, anime and movies ticked over as normal. The new series, *Pokémon Advanced Generation*, saw Ash and Pikachu journey to Hoenn, mirroring the new mainline games, and movies such as *Jirachi – Wish Maker* once again introduced Legendary-tier Pokémon to the silver screen. This era of *Pokémon* saw some exciting real-world news, too, as the first theme park based on *Pokémon*, called Poképark, opened to Japanese fans.

2002 POKÉMON RUBY & SAPPHIRE

Whisking you off to the Hoenn region, *Ruby & Sapphire* showed off *Pokémon* in a much more pleasing, colourful way than other mainline games thanks to the new Game Boy Advance hardware. These new games were well-received by fans, although some were disappointed they couldn't return to older regions.

2002 POKÉMON ADVANCED

The anime continued along at its usual pace this Generation. *Advanced* took Ash over to Hoenn, where he teamed up with newcomer May (based on the female playable character in *Ruby & Sapphire*), while Misty sat this series arc out. Mixing things up somewhat, May is more fixated on competing in Pokémon Contests.

2003 POKÉMON COLOSSEUM

Those who were hungry for a full, 3D *Pokémon* adventure on a main console were given this epic RPG on GameCube this Generation. *Colosseum* differentiated itself from the main games by having you 'Snag' Pokémon that were stolen by Team Snagem (inventive, eh?) and purifying them from a shadowy affliction.

2003 POKÉMON PINBALL: RUBY & SAPPHIRE

Poké Balls are like pinballs, right? Regardless, this update of the Game Boy Color *Pokémon Pinball* from 1999 is a compelling little simulation with some *Pokémon*-themed escapism thrown in. You'd be surprised at the number of hours that will pass once you grip a Game Boy Advance loaded with this charming little title.

2004 POKÉMON FIRERED & LEAFGREEN

The original games were only eight years old by 2004, but that didn't stop Game Freak and The Pokémon Company from remaking them. This reimagining faithfully recreates the original experience but brings in the newer features from *Ruby & Sapphire*, plus these remakes include a new sub-region: the Sevii Islands.

2004 POKÉMON EMERALD

Continuing the newly established tradition of releasing an updated version, *Emerald* brought a number of quality-of-life changes to the mainline third-Generation games. It also acted as a bridge between the two opposing *Ruby* and *Sapphire* versions, blending their stories into a more complete tale and giving the Legendary Dragon Rayquaza a more prominent role.

2005 POKÉPARK

Looking to bring *Pokémon* to a theme park setting, two Poképarks were built in Japan and Taiwan in 2005. The parks featured shops, rides and all sorts of goodies for *Pokémon* superfans, including an exclusive Nintendo DS minigame: *PokéPark: Fishing Rally DS*. The idea didn't catch on, however, and both parks were shut down in 2006.

Image source: Gnsin

2005 POKÉMON MYSTERY DUNGEON: RED & BLUE RESCUE TEAM

This duet of dungeon-crawlers released across two different consoles: *Red* was exclusive to the Game Boy Advance and *Blue* debuted on the Nintendo DS. Both play similarly, with *Blue* taking advantage of the DS's two screens. If you're a fan of tactical games, give these a go.

2006 POKÉMON RANGER

Alongside *Mystery Dungeon*, a second sub-series was born this Generation. *Ranger* was a more casual game that made use of the Nintendo DS's touchscreen – here, you used it to temporarily catch Pokémon out in the field. The game was able to connect to later-Generation games to transfer the Mythic Pokémon Manaphy.

2006 POKÉMON RANGER AND THE TEMPLE OF THE SEA

Bridging a thematic gap between the *Pokémon Ranger* game and the anime, this final movie instalment for this Generation sees a Ranger entrusting a mysterious egg to Ash, Brock and May, who must keep it safe to prevent an underwater civilisation from being lost forever.

POKÉDEX 252-386

2002 brought us the third Generation of Pokémon, and this time there were over 100 extra Pocket Monsters to collect. This third Pokédex expansion felt a little different from the others because these Pokémon had little to no connection to the creatures that came before. Except for two new babies, Azurill and Wynaut, the Pokémon that debuted with *Ruby & Sapphire* were a confident bunch that wanted to stand on their own two feet.

That's not to say the design of these Hoenn-native 'mon marked a departure from the now-established traditions. There was still a trio of sublime starters (Treeko, Torchic and Mudkip), along with a whole ecosystem of wild Pokémon of all shapes and sizes (a lot more Dark and Steel types were added, too), and like *Gold & Silver*, two mighty Legendary monsters fought for your attention: Groudon and Kyogre. These two prehistoric titans kicked off a trend where the Legendries are more tied into the history of the world, with Groudon being responsible for creating land and Kyogre being in charge of the high seas.

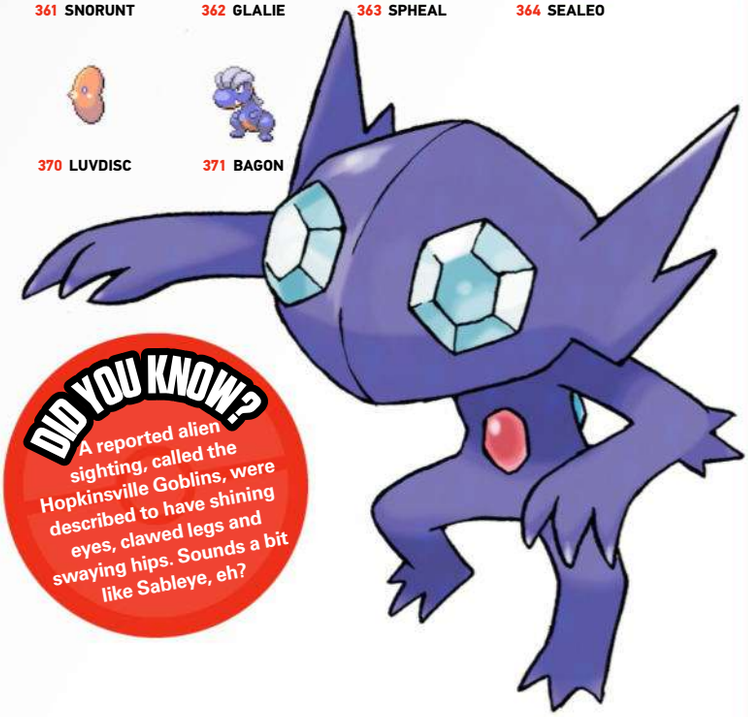
There were more unique dual-types, too, making this roster more versatile compared to previous eras. This time you had Fire-Fighting Pokémon like Blaziken or Grass-Dark creatures like Shiftry, and even a hyper-strong Steel-Psychic combo with Metagross. The Pokémon were a lot more diverse-looking, too, perhaps because Hoenn featured a range of environments such as rainforests, deserts, volcanic caves and even underwater locales.

The third wave of 135 Pokémon showed that the design team still had a wealth of ideas when it came to creating unique creatures, which says a lot because these monsters are still well-loved by fans today.

DID YOU KNOW?

A very early sketch that predates *Ruby & Sapphire* shows an unused Pokémon that has the top part of Latias and the legs and claws of Blaziken.

"This third Pokédex expansion felt a little different the others because these Pokémon had little to no connection to the creatures that came before"



DID YOU KNOW?

A reported alien sighting, called the Hopkinsville Goblins, were described to have shining eyes, clawed legs and swaying hips. Sounds a bit like Sableye, eh?

POKÉMON RUBY, SAPPHIRE & EMERALD

More Pokémon, more mechanics and more depth than ever before – Generation III seemed to have it all. So how did it almost fail?

Words by Dom Peppiatt

***Pokémon*'s third era marked a real split in its audience: until now, the international *Pokémon* phenomenon had enchanted a generation, but five years on from the launch of the Game Boy games in the West, a large portion of the series' fans had grown up.** Many wouldn't pick up the Game Boy Advance and follow *Pokémon* into its awkward middle years – detractors swore that the franchise would go the way of the yo-yo, the Pog and the Beanie Baby.

The Game Boy Advance was the perfect platform for what many – even to this day – would call *Pokémon's* 'transition game'. The franchise was finding its feet, toying with formulas that worked on the older Game Boy models while trying a couple of new things to kick some life into the role-playing game. The Game Boy Advance itself was met with something of a shrug from the general game-playing population; a nice idea, a cool little upgrade, but nothing earth-shattering or game-changing. An uncomfortable parallel to *Pokémon Ruby, Sapphire* & *Emerald*, perhaps.

Where other developers made the jump from 8-bit cartridges to 32-bit ones to develop more detailed art styles, more complex mechanical logic and more depth, Game Freak largely stuck with what it knew. New Pokémon were added, the interface was redrawn and the world received an overhaul in its style, but the game was still undoubtedly *Pokémon*. Game Freak intentionally kept its engine uncomplicated and simple so that its end users – still ultimately imagined as children – could enjoy the game without any hesitation.

There was a slightly more child-friendly tone to these games than in the previous Generations, too; the antagonistic team(s) shifted from a shady, criminal organisation to more of an idealistic protest group. The story was spelled out more obviously, with less left unsaid and off-screen. Your rival was amateurish, and didn't fully evolve their starter

NEW INNOVATIONS

Ruby, Sapphire & Emerald lay the foundations for plenty of long-standing Pokémon mechanics

ABILITIES

■ As well as a Nature and hidden 'Individual Value' (or 'IV') stats, as of Generation III, Pokémon could also have one or two of 77 different Abilities. These passive traits were essentially special attributes assigned to your companions, in addition to types and moves, that affect both in-battle and out-of-battle behaviour.

SECRET BASES

■ If you own a Pokémon that knows Secret Power, you are able to decorate a special hidden area with accessories, furniture and Pokémon dolls, making an imprint on the world that's unique to you. Via communicating with other players, you can share these dens, and an NPC will emulate you within another player's game.

CONTESTS

■ Pokémon Contests are particularly popular in Hoenn. These pageants host Pokémon, who are instructed to show off their style in one of five different types of Contest: Coolness, Beauty, Cuteness, Cleverness or Toughness. Through these efforts, Ribbons can be won and certain prizes claimed from NPCs.

DOUBLE BATTLES

■ Double Battles were introduced in this Generation. In these showdowns, you can use two Pokémon at the same time in order to beat your opponent. This added more strategy to brawls, as you could use moves to support your other Pokémon. Watch out, though: some attacks will even hit your own Pokémon!

WEATHER

■ While Generation II introduced in-battle weather that boosted certain elemental moves, Generation III had it in the field – depending on the weather a Route was experiencing, your partners would be more or less effective, and certain Pokémon would be more or less likely to appear in the wild.

Pokémon in the original version of the game. The tutorial was longer, and there were many more NPCs woven into the world to help you understand what was going on at any given time. The game was easier than the two that had come before it, and even the 'final dungeon' of the Sky Tower felt a little anticlimactic in the grand scheme of things.

The story was more force-fed this time around, too. Team Aqua and Magma – which faction you fought depended on your version of the game – were introduced to contextualise the game's Legendary Pokémon, the monsters on the version covers, and make your eventual meeting and capturing of them a more portentous occasion. In this Generation, everything got a bit more 'anime'.

Team Aqua and Magma galvanised the plot, too, giving more notable narrative beats than anything Game Freak had tried in the last two Generations. Throughout the story you'd encounter your designated team interfering with various in-world assets – weather stations, volcanoes, natural history museums – and each encounter would lead you to their ultimate goal: fully rewriting the climate of the Hoenn region.

This tied nicely into the new weather system the games introduced. Though many *Gold, Silver & Crystal* veterans lamented the toning down of the day/night cycle, happening upon a new Route drenched in rain, being hit by hail or coated in layers of volcanic ash was still an exciting prospect, and it gave the Hoenn region a more dynamic personality. As per Junichi Masuda, who directed the game, the weather effects and various elevations in the game – from the towering Mt Chimney to the cavernous Cave of Origin, the lush rainforests of the north to the desert flatlands of the central

» [Game Boy Advance] Double battles are a common occurrence in Hoenn, so you need to make sure you keep both your first and second Pokémon in good condition.

region – were all inspired by the real-world Japanese island of Kyushu.

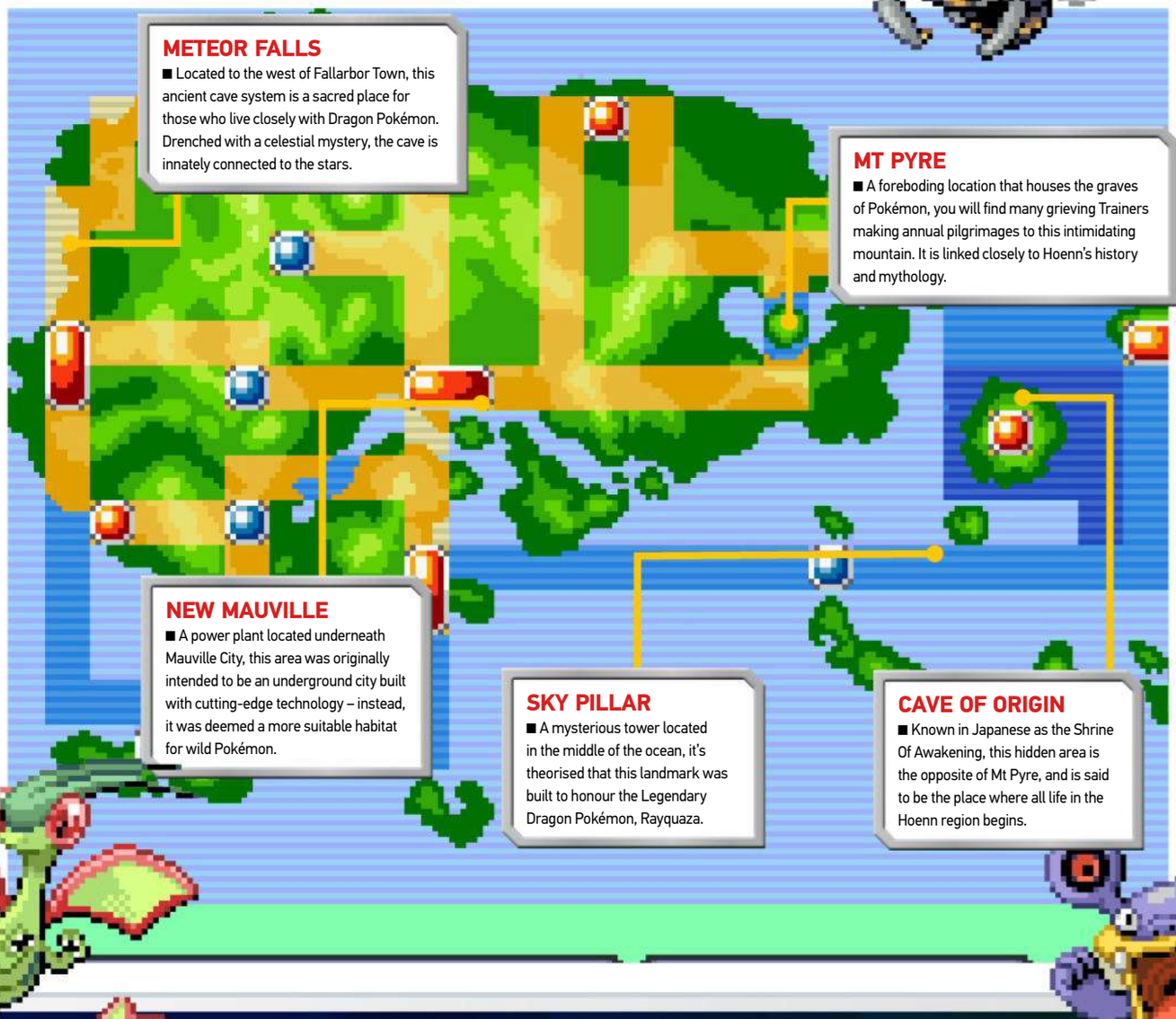
The integration of braille puzzles in some subterranean and subaquatic challenges injected a layer of mystery and history into the region, too, which built nicely on the deeper *Pokémon* lore *Gold & Silver* had built the foundations for years before.

Despite attracting criticism for a wealth of sea Routes, Hoenn is one of the most varied regions in the *Pokémon* world, featuring over 34 individual Routes and 16 major towns and cities. 'Abundance' was one of the key words the development team focused on when they made this world, and it shows. Even in the soundtrack, things were a lot fuller and louder. Gone were the nods to solemn Japanese temples and historical landmarks – instead Hoenn rejoiced in its jovial resort towns, gimmicky cities built in the trees or on top of the ocean and urban landscapes teeming with life enabled by a larger processing unit. A wanton use of trumpets, little synthesised french horns, pianos and string ensembles defined Hoenn's plucky, wondrous atmosphere.

It's a distinct change in flavour from the classic Japanese feel of Kanto and Johto. Every Route and every city, with its weather, its geography and its native Pokémon, serves to reflect the core battle between the Legendary Pokémon Kyogre and Groudon: water and earth, Aqua and Magma, sea and land.

GREETINGS FROM HOENN

A serene world inspired by the real-world Japanese island of Kyushu



METEOR FALLS

■ Located to the west of Fallarbor Town, this ancient cave system is a sacred place for those who live closely with Dragon Pokémon. Drenched with a celestial mystery, the cave is innately connected to the stars.

MT PYRE

■ A foreboding location that houses the graves of Pokémon, you will find many grieving Trainers making annual pilgrimages to this intimidating mountain. It is linked closely to Hoenn's history and mythology.

NEW MAUVILLE

■ A power plant located underneath Mauville City, this area was originally intended to be an underground city built with cutting-edge technology – instead, it was deemed a more suitable habitat for wild Pokémon.

SKY PILLAR

■ A mysterious tower located in the middle of the ocean, it's theorised that this landmark was built to honour the Legendary Dragon Pokémon, Rayquaza.

CAVE OF ORIGIN

■ Known in Japanese as the Shrine Of Awakening, this hidden area is the opposite of Mt Pyre, and is said to be the place where all life in the Hoenn region begins.

» [Game Boy Advance] Your Hoenn journey begins as you move to the temperate new region with both your mother and father – a first for the series.

» [Game Boy Advance] From the very beginning of your journey, you'd start bumping into interesting new species of Pokémon in the Hoenn region.

» [Game Boy Advance] The 'trio of life' are a central part of the story, and would lay the foundations for *Pokémon*'s focus on myths going forward.

The narrative may have taken centre stage, and was ultimately padded out and given a dramatic anime-style makeover in the *Omega Ruby & Alpha Sapphire* remakes, but it was the Pokémon themselves that would see the biggest evolution in the jump to Game Boy Advance. They became more unique.

Returning players would complain that, for the first time in its history, this was the first set of *Pokémon* games that would not contain all previously released monsters. Even some undeniable fan favourites in the form of Eevee and its 'Eeveelutions', the Gengar line and the Tyranitar line didn't make the cut. But that served to make Hoenn more unique – instead of just having all the Pokémon you've seen before crammed onto one new area of the expanding Poké-planet, Hoenn had its own ecosystem, its own ecological sensibilities, its own personality.

Granted, a lot of that personality was more humanoid than we'd previously seen, but that was because Masuda and Ken Sugimori had instructed their artists to go back to their childhoods and think of the movies and cartoons they'd watched when thinking up new designs for Hoenn's local species. Taking a *Sentai*-inspired design, say, and thumbing through an encyclopedia of insects in order to add attributes or features to make it more Pokémon-like was the name of the game for this Generation. A cursory look at the likes of Gardevoir, Blaziken, Glalie, Swampert and many others will attest to that. Given that the eccentric denizens of Hoenn have a penchant for showing off their Pokémon in elaborate, pageant-like Contests, you can see why the local fauna may be a little more humanoid in design, too.

Some Generation III designs became instant classics, but contemporary critics would malign a raft of the designs, calling them pale imitations of what had come before – Beautifly and Swellow, for instance, could be seen as riffs on Butterfree and Pidgeot. By the time the now-standard 'third version' of the Generation, *Emerald*, hit the shelves in 2004, the missing Pokémon issue was largely moot: just about every previously introduced monster was obtainable through either *Pokémon Colosseum* or the fancy new Generation I remakes, *Pokémon FireRed & LeafGreen*, by that point.

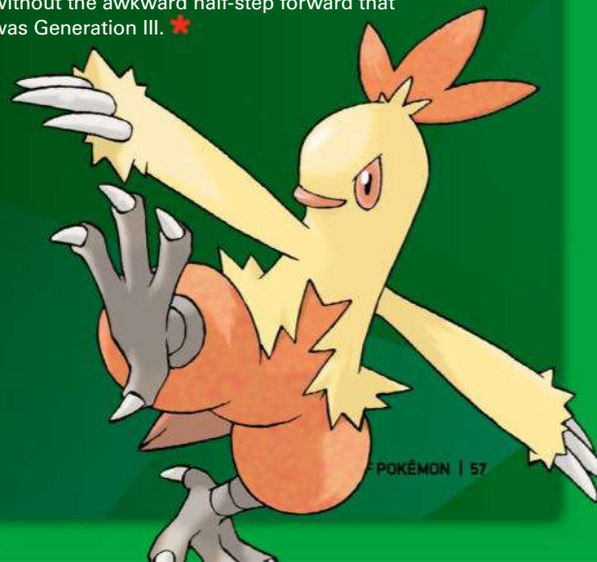
Whether you liked the 135 new designs or not, however, you can't deny Game Freak pushed the proverbial boat out when it came to making each and every one of them as unique as possible. Aside from the pre-existing typing and evolution conventions, each Pokémon from Generation III onwards would have hidden, independent effort and individual value stats, a passive ability and a Nature.

The true appeal of this new Generation for the hardcore players coming back for their third *Pokémon* experience, it would soon become apparent, was in the metagame – the incredibly mathematical, min-max catnip that was competitive Pokémon battling. The idea of varied, more powerful Pokémon you could encounter at any moment added more value to the idea of 'catching 'em all' – sure, you got a nice rare Beldum… but is it the best Beldum it could be? Catch more, compare Natures, see if one has a better attack stat and go on to try your hand in the Battle Frontier that *Pokémon Emerald* would introduce.

The Battle Frontier was *Emerald*'s crowning achievement, and to this day it remains a series highlight for many long-term fans. For many, it would be a gentle introduction into the brutal stat-crunching world of post-game Pokémon battles, offering its own progression that mimics the setup of the eight Gym Badge quest that was now an expected part of the *Pokémon* formula. If you had been uncertain about this Generation with *Ruby* & *Sapphire*, *Emerald* would serve to win you over – it was the definitive Hoenn experience.

It was a slow start, but with the introduction of weather effects, gender mechanics and double battles – intended to show off the Game Boy Advance's four-player capabilities – this new Generation laid the foundations for what would become 'modern *Pokémon*': each game from here on out would have, at the very least, a solid competitive foundation hidden under the main game that is essentially 'for kids'. It could be argued that *Ruby, Sapphire* & *Emerald* saw *Pokémon* really start to head down two roads in one mainline series, meandering between competitive and casual in every release on the Nintendo DS and beyond.

The enriched role-playing functionality may have been distorted, obscured behind unexplained mechanics and fairly impenetrable without some sort of third-party guide, but this 'hardcore' competitive element would prove to be the secret ingredient *Pokémon* would trade on for years to come. And it wouldn't exist without the awkward half-step forward that was Generation III.



POKÉMON
REMAKES

Remakes are just as much a part of the Pokémon series as the original mainline games are, and there's just as much history to them

Words by Dom Peppiatt

Twenty-five years is a long time for any media franchise to live. Yet *Pokémon*'s popularity has maintained for two-and-a-half decades, consistently bringing in new players and tempting back veterans with each new release. Nostalgia is a powerful tool, and Nintendo and The Pokémon Company wield it with deft ease, trading on warm childhood memories for the older fans while cherry-picking mascots and mechanics from legacy Generations in order to keep new fans excited. Ever since 2004, *Pokémon* has adopted a semi-regular cadence, weaving in remakes of its old titles into the series' overall release schedule. For every new world we're given to explore, we're also treated to a reimagining of a classic one, too. It's a rhythm that's worked a treat, and is a proven testing ground for ideas that maybe wouldn't work in a mainline release.

> "Game Freak was aware that the Pokémon world was starting to get more complicated"

It all started with remakes of the first mainline *Pokémon* games, *Red & Green*. Discarding the *Blue* localisation the games had adopted for the West, *FireRed & LeafGreen* were mostly designed to satiate fan appetite for the missing Generation I monsters that didn't make the cut in *Ruby & Sapphire*'s original Game Boy Advance release. This means these remakes appeared just eight years after Generation I's debut – but what a difference those eight years made. The memory-hamstrung black-and-white pixels of the original Game Boy had been replaced with a 16-bit reimagining of Kanto, realised in vibrant colour and supported with a richer, more dynamic musical score.

Game Freak had the opportunity to show players how far the series had come in less than a decade with these retreads, and seeing the likes of Dark and Steel-type moves in Generation I battles, Johto Legendary creatures roaming the locales in the post-game and split stats, Pokémon genders, abilities and more besides make their way into Kanto's once-simplistic take on the formula was an eye-opening moment that had seen the changes come in incrementally through *Gold, Silver & Crystal* and *Ruby, Sapphire & Emerald*. Better yet, revisiting old Trainer types meant that Game Freak would need to supply new art for many of the old enemies players had committed to memory – something that wouldn't be echoed in later remakes, as Trainer archetypes typically retain their looks.

That said, Game Freak was also aware that – already – the *Pokémon* world was starting to get a bit more complicated as new monsters, new mechanics and new ideas started to grow naturally into the universe. *FireRed & LeafGreen* were designed around the idea of simplicity, with

the development team thinning out the *Ruby & Sapphire* engine a little in order to make the game more appealing to those players that had picked the Generation I games up a mere eight years ago. It was a successful gambit: initial production of the games in Japan was limited to just 500,000 copies, but international demand for the remakes would propel this first experiment in nostalgia to bring in a massive 12 million sales for Game Freak and Nintendo. The stage was set for the remake development cycle to continue onwards alongside new titles.

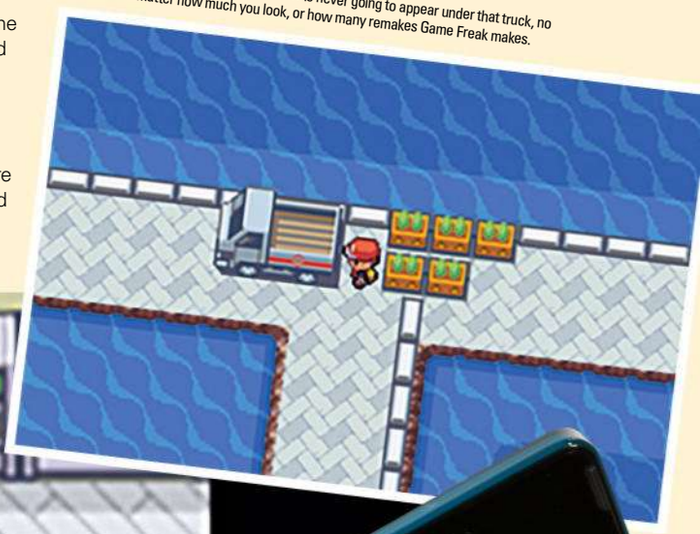
HeartGold & SoulSilver would come next in 2009 (or 2010 in the West), a decade on from the launch of the original Game Boy Color titles in 1999. Incorporating elements from *Crystal*, these remakes would cement the cadence of the release schedule: for every new platform, you'd get a new Generation of *Pokémon*, and once that Generation had been released, you'd see remakes built in that game's engine – or a version of it. To that end, *HeartGold & SoulSilver* would share a lot of traits with *Diamond, Pearl & Platinum*.

> **"Every single Pokémon from the roster of 493 could follow behind the player"**

Perhaps one of the biggest changes for *HeartGold & SoulSilver* was that every single Pokémon from the then-available roster of 493 could follow behind the player and be seen in the overworld. The whole point of the Generation II remakes was the connection between player and Pokémon and the relationship they shared – hence the Heart and Soul prefixes in the titles – so being able to have a little interaction with the first Pokémon in your party on a whim helped deepen that idea of having a pet, and forging a real-life relationship with it.

Unlike in the original games, the mascot Legendary Pokémon were woven into the story of *HeartGold & SoulSilver* – something Game Freak had learned from Generation III and IV – and they now played a major part in the overall narrative, too. This set the scene for the *Black & White* Nintendo DS games that would launch after these remakes, marking the era of a much more narrative-focused and Legendary-involved *Pokémon* world. Via small iterations and

» [Game Boy Advance] Even getting to the end of the Elite Four felt different thanks to how much had changed during the course of the remakes.



» [Game Boy Advance] Mew is never going to appear under that truck, no matter how much you look, or how many remakes Game Freak makes.

REMAKE VS ORIGINAL

They say 'don't mess with the classics'... but sometimes you have to

RED, GREEN & BLUE VS *FIRERED & LEAFGREEN*

■ Building on the original games in just about every way possible while also removing some frankly broken and unbalanced mechanics, the Generation I remakes came at just the right time, cementing the idea that the first wave of *Pokémon* – plus a lick of fresh paint – for many fans out there, is the best.

WINNER

FIRERED & LEAFGREEN

GOLD & SILVER VS *HEARTGOLD & SOULSILVER*

■ Better music, elements of *Pokémon Crystal* woven in, a fuller and more realised interpretation of the Kanto region, countless quality-of-life improvements and some cameos from later Champions... all that and having your favourite Pokémon follow you around everywhere you go? That's the icing on the cake.

WINNER

HEARTGOLD & SOULSILVER

RUBY & SAPPHIRE VS *OMEGA RUBY AND ALPHA SAPPHIRE*

■ Though the 3DS remakes did add in some better mechanics and give players the option to take on more content in the endgame, many purists will bemoan the addition of over-the-top anime-like narrative beats and Mega Evolutions. Turns out that you can change too much when revisiting a classic.

WINNER

RUBY & SAPPHIRE

YELLOW VS *LET'S GO, PIKACHU & EEVEE*

■ The biggest departure we have ever seen in a *Pokémon* remake, and the first time we've ever seen the 'third' version of a game remade. Granted, these Switch games may have leaned too heavily on *Pokémon Go* for some people's tastes, but you can't hate a game for getting a whole new generation of players into the series.

WINNER

LET'S GO, PIKACHU & EEVEE

MYSTERY DUNGEON RED & BLUE VS *MYSTERY DUNGEON DX*

■ While the originals were great for their time, *Rescue Team DX* has some truly impressive and beautiful watercolour-inspired graphics that make it stand out compared to any other *Pokémon* project out there. A triumph in retouching with taste, you can enjoy the remake even if you didn't play the originals.

WINNER

MYSTERY DUNGEON DX

tweaks to the originals, Game Freak was continuing to perfect the *Pokémon* formula in these remakes.

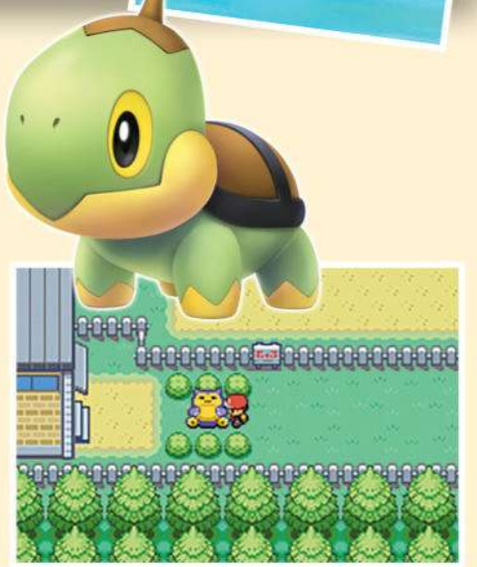
The remakes also proved to be fertile grounds for Game Freak to weave in larger *Pokémon* lore: *HeartGold & SoulSilver* saw the Champions from all previous games make an appearance – Blue, Lance, Steven and Cynthia are all present, and in the post-game they each have events tied to them that can unlock more Pokémon in-world for the player to catch. If you'd been playing all the mainline releases and the remakes, by this point you could truly start to piece together a picture of the wider *Pokémon* world, complete with its own sociopolitical geography, its own interlinked history and its own curious science.

Enter *Omega Ruby & Alpha Sapphire*. Thanks to the 3D engine that had been introduced in *Pokémon X & Y*, these are possibly the remakes that vary the most from the source material – Mega Evolutions, the introduction of the Fairy type, 3D models instead of 2D sprites, a wealth of TMs, a larger regional Pokédex thanks to pre or post-evolution monsters from Hoenn, Horde encounters... a lot of the differences that had been introduced in both Generation IV and V now made a home in *Omega Ruby & Alpha Sapphire*, making them feel radically different from previous remakes in the series. Moreover, the developer had taken some seemingly unfinished parts of the original games and expanded upon them greatly – one of the most obvious areas this happened to is the mysterious Sea Mauville facility that was widely redesigned and fleshed out in the 3DS games. The Sky Pillar – the endgame dungeon of the Generation III games – was also rethought, made a little less sadistic and repainted with a mural dedicated to a hitherto-unheard of new race of NPCs, the Draconid.

Game Freak also saw it fit to redraw the story of the third Generation games over the top of the lines that had existed before. Though the narrative beats were largely the same – the player needs to stop either Team Aqua or Team Magma from causing a climate catastrophe by using Kyogre and Groudon, respectively – more characters were introduced, and 'Mega' Pokémon became integral to the plot. The mascot Legendary monsters also saw a revision, and could now go Primal. Further to that, a whole new narrative 'episode' was tacked onto the end of the games, allowing players to travel to outer space and battle the Mythical extraterrestrial entity Deoxys.

In the middle of all these decidedly more outlandish escapades, *Omega Ruby & Alpha Sapphire* also hinted at something bigger… various pieces of NPC dialogue in the games explicitly stated that the original *Ruby & Sapphire* worlds already exist in another dimension, and that you're playing through the narrative at the same pace at which the original Generation III events occur.

It's also implied here that *Pokémon X & Y* – the 'companion' games in this generation to *Omega Ruby & Alpha Sapphire* – take place at the same time as *Pokémon Black 2 & White 2*, directly linking the Generation VI games to the Generation V games. The existence of these other dimensions and other worlds, in which it's inferred that all your past *Pokémon* adventures may have occurred, is legitimised by the Mythical Pokémon Hoopa, which has the ability to tear open rifts in space-time and move freely between any of these long-



» [Game Boy Advance] Nostalgia for the original games was only eight years strong by the time *FireRed & LeafGreen* arrived.

» [Nintendo DS] A splash of vibrant colour was added to the original *Gold & Silver*, thanks to the DS's enhanced power.

» [Nintendo Switch] Meltan was the first Pokémon introduced to the world via *Pokémon Go* – but at least it could be imported and played in *Let's Go*.

» [Nintendo 3DS] The bonus narrative you could play through in the *Omega Ruby & Alpha Sapphire* post-game really took the series to some far-out places.

» [Nintendo 3DS] It was nice to see older Leaders and Trainers get a lick of paint in the 3DS sequels – some of them even looked better.

established universes. What's more, *Omega Ruby & Alpha Sapphire* confirmed that Pokémon had been building to this kind of metaphysical revelation for over a decade, with a lot of the remake games in particular leading players to question the nature of other regions, worlds and timelines. It's some high-level soft science, sure, but it fits suspiciously well in the *Pokémon* universe.

This radical rethinking of how to approach the remake worked for Game Freak, though – *Omega Ruby & Alpha Sapphire* boast over 14 million sales between them, making them the most successful remakes in the series to date. An expanded story, a massive shift in tone and the decision to fully embrace the most recent changes to the *Pokémon* formula clearly worked a treat.

And now, with the shiny new release of *Pokémon Brilliant Diamond & Shining Pearl*, Game Freak is once again throwing away tradition and experimenting with something new. For the first time in the studio's storied history, Game Freak has outsourced development to a Japanese studio called ILCA. Given that Game Freak has its hands full with *Pokémon*'s first foray into open-world territory with *Pokémon Legends: Arceus*, ILCA has been tasked with modernising the first two Nintendo DS games of Generation IV. It's an odd choice for Game Freak and Nintendo to make – ILCA, or 'I Love Computer Art', actually started as an animation, film and TV studio, moving to incorporate game development later.

Since pitching in with Japanese development teams as a support studio, though, ILCA has built a healthy roster of successful gaming projects: if the studio can make good on the likes of *Yakuza 0*, *Dragon Quest XI*, *NieR: Automata* and a Domino's/*Hatsune Miku* crossover, it stands to reason it'll be able to handle the remakes of the debut *Pokémon* DS games. Game Freak's own Junichi Masuda oversaw production of the remakes, and acted as a guiding the caretaker developer to ensure that the sense of scale, the thrill of the battle and the personality of the world was kept intact. Interestingly, we're seeing the games deviate hugely from the Switch's first set of games, *Sword & Shield*, and use a whole new engine to boot – this is the first time we've seen the remakes stand so starkly apart from the latest titles.

PERIPHERAL VISION

Every remake needs a fancy gimmick to sell it, right?

WIRELESS ADAPTOR

INCLUDED WITH:
FIRERED* & *LEAFGREEN

■ For the most part, the Wireless Adapter was a pretty overlooked peripheral, but its greatest utility came in *Pokémon FireRed*, *LeafGreen* and *Emerald*, where up to 39 wireless adapter-connected players can meet up in a virtual in-game lobby called the 'Union Room'. Here, players could take part in battles or request trades. Granted, each of the games could still use the Game Boy Advance Game Link Cable, but anyone with a Wireless Adapter could also take part in Mystery Gift giveaways at various *Pokémon*-related events.

POKÉWALKER

INCLUDED WITH:
HEARTGOLD* & *SOULSILVER

■ The Pokéwalker is a Poké Ball-shaped pedometer that can communicate with *Pokémon HeartGold & SoulSilver* via infrared, and effectively meant that you could take Pokémon out into the real world with you and train them up while you went about your day. Every time you move, the Pokémon inside gains experience points and the player earns 'Watts' – you could level up and find items even when you weren't playing your game. The more you walk, the more Routes you discover, and the more rewards you can earn... and the pedometer is even considered particularly accurate compared to even dedicated fitness hardware.

POKÉ BALL PLUS

INCLUDED WITH:
LET'S GO PIKACHU* & *EEVEE

■ The Poké Ball Plus can be used to play *Let's Go, Pikachu!* & *Let's Go, Eevee!* in place of the Joy-Con – it has similar buttons and can be used as a motion control, too. It adds a layer of immersion to the game – if you catch a Pokémon with the peripheral, it will wobble three times, as it does in the games, before confirming the catch. It will also play the Pokémon's cry if the catch is successful. Better yet, you can 'take your Pokémon for a stroll' and have it spin Photo Discs or capture Pokémon in *Pokémon Go*.

» [Nintendo Switch] Even *Sun & Moon*'s Alolan forms made it into the pair of *Let's Go!* games in the end, making for more type variety than *Pokémon Yellow* ever saw.

It's an interesting experiment, and could spell the end of Game Freak's long-standing exclusive hold on the mainline series. The only time we've seen such a deviation from the 'norm' when it comes to the cadence of remake releases is with 2018's *Pokémon: Let's Go Pikachu! & Let's Go Eevee!* – a duo of games geared more towards a younger audience that aped mechanics from the iOS and Android *Pokémon Go* game that exploded in popularity in 2016.

Interestingly, Masuda himself considers the Switch's first *Pokémon* games to be remakes of *Pokémon Yellow*, rather than *Red & Green*, because in his eyes *Yellow* "resonated more" with younger players thanks to its toned-down difficulty and its relationship with the anime series. You can see this amplified in the *Let's Go!* games – their insistence on putting the cute mascot Pokémon Eevee and Pikachu front and centre, and the more anime-inspired, closer-to-the-player visuals really play into that more cartoonish, child-centric outlook.

The games focused more on the capturing element of *Pokémon* than anything else we'd seen from the series in many years. As well as dialling back the Pokémon in the game to the base 151 – making the feat of catching 'em all much more achievable – Game Freak and Nintendo also altered how the player was rewarded for catching Pokémon. Your party would gain experience per catch, and you could end battles almost immediately by using motion controls and good timing to catch a Pokémon before a single move has been used. The better your throw, the better your timing and the rarer the Pokémon, the more experience your team would receive.

The fact you could also see what Pokémon are available in the overworld – and play everything in co-op with another person – made these, more than any others, feel like true, ground-up remakes. This duo of games also revealed the scope of just how much *Pokémon Go* impacted Game Freak as a studio: the fact that a mobile game developed by a third-party studio managed to attract such attention from the world at large that Game Freak saw the need to release a game dedicated almost entirely to letting players import their mobile catches to a console is a landmark moment for the company.

It's likely that in the years to come Game Freak will continue to move away from the traditional *Pokémon* formula with its remake efforts. With new studios being approached to work on future remakes and the way new players are being introduced to *Pokémon* altered via mobile apps and spin-off games, it's looking more and more likely that the nostalgic arm of *Pokémon* will also be where the series enjoys the most innovation. Whether we see more *Let's Go!* games carry on what Pikachu and Eevee started in 2018, or see more developers given special access to the Pokémon vaults when it comes to Generation V and beyond, it's safe to say the future of *Pokémon* is in good hands… even if they aren't the hands that first brought the series into this world.

» [Nintendo Switch] With *Brilliant Diamond & Shining Pearl*, we're seeing Game Freak give the remakes to another studio for the first time – will it pay off?

» [Nintendo Switch] *Brilliant Diamond & Shining Pearl* mark a pretty huge deviation from the art style we've seen in other *Pokémon* games.

GENERATION IV

2006–2010

SINNOH REGION

This exciting Generation connected Trainers across the globe, while two insanely popular Nintendo consoles doled out a raft of spin-offs

By the time the third Generation of *Pokémon* ended, a new Nintendo handheld had arrived: the Nintendo DS. This new console had two screens, more power and was massively popular with both hardcore gamers and curious casuals alike. Nintendo, Game Freak and The Pokémon Company sat back as the DS started flying off the store shelves and deemed that the handheld would be the perfect home for the next wave of *Pokémon*.

As always, a new duet of mainline games ushered in this new era: *Diamond & Pearl* arrived in September 2006, along with a brand-new anime arc. The new games were again well-received, however, critics began to take note that the series tried-and-tested formula hadn't changed in a significant way since *Gold & Silver*. That said, *Diamond & Pearl* hit a million sales within five days of them releasing. Notably, these games marked an important debut for the *Pokémon* franchise as it ventured online. Aspiring Pokémon Masters were now able to trade and battle Pokémon across the world, helping the community aspect of the game to flourish.

While gamers were trading and flinging attacks across hemispheres over the internet, another raft of spin-off titles arrived on the Nintendo DS and Wii, the latter of which was also proving to be a massive record-breaking hit with casual audiences. Both *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon* and *Pokémon Ranger* received their own sequels this Generation, cementing their status as a pair of established sub-series, while more child-friendly experiences like *PokéPark* showed that *Pokémon* had something for all ages.

While the videogames side of the *Pokémon* business was booming, this Generation was still business as usual for everything else – the cycle of anime and movies still produced decent entertainment, but with not a lot of innovation, while the merchandise branch was as evergreen as it ever was. ✱

2006 POKÉMON DIAMOND & PEARL

These games introduced Trainers to the region of Hokkaido-inspired Sinnoh and the new Pokémon that dwelled there. Also debuting was online play. Thanks to the Nintendo DS's Wi-Fi prowess, gamers could now trade and battle Pokémon over the internet – you could even chat with your opponents.

2006 POKÉMON BATTLE REVOLUTION

Much like *Stadium*, *Stadium 2* and *Colosseum* before it, *Battle Revolution* for the Wii followed the trend of offering a 3D battler on a powerful home console. The edition could communicate with the DS wirelessly, and, like *Diamond & Pearl*, offered internet connectivity. That said, *Battle Revolution* sadly didn't offer a story mode.

2007 POKÉMON MYSTERY DUNGEON: EXPLORERS OF TIME & DARKNESS

These follow-ups to the last Generation's *Mystery Dungeon* games were updated to harness the dual-screened power of the Nintendo DS. While critics weren't wowed by these editions, they still proved popular enough to not tank the *Mystery Dungeon* sub-series.

2008 POKÉMON PLATINUM

This updated version fixed the few issues people had with *Diamond & Pearl* and featured a new form for the ghostly Dragon Pokémon, Giratina. Also new was a perspective-altering 'Distortion World', an alternate dimension that players could explore. At the time, this was lauded as 'the ultimate *Pokémon* experience' by critics.

2008 POKÉMON RANGER: SHADOWS OF ALMIA

Faring better with critics than the *Mystery Dungeon* games, *Shadows Of Almia* was praised for evolving the mechanics that were established in the previous *Pokémon Ranger* game. This sequel revised the capturing system to be more focused around filling a 'Friendship Guage' but still involved touchscreen tomfoolery.

2009 POKÉMON HEARTGOLD & SOULSILVER

The remake series delivered a pair of absolute classics with *HeartGold & SoulSilver*. These reimaginings of the second-Generation mainline titles were lovingly created and for the first time since *Pokémon Yellow* let you have your Pokémon follow you. Additionally, it came with an amazing peripheral, which we'll get to next…

2009 POKÉWALKER

The Pokéwalker was bundled exclusively with *HeartGold & SoulSilver* and let you take a Pokémon friend with you for a walk in real life. Like the Pokémon Pikachu device, its built-in pedometer let you build up experience for your pal, and you could even use it to catch unique Pokémon or use its Dowsing Machine function to find special items.

2009 POKÉMON RUMBLE

Those who wanted a more action-packed *Pokémon* experience had to make do with *Smash Bros* until this beat-'em-up arrived on Nintendo Wii in 2009. *Rumble* placed you in the paws of a Pokémon and tasked you with clearing out enclosed arenas by button-mashing your way to victory. It was some decent, mindless fun.

2009 POKÉMON WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

The *Pokémon Trading Card Game* had enjoyed a competitive stage for many years, but 2009 mixed the World Championships up to include both *TCG* and videogame scenes. Fans battled across cards and *Pokémon Platinum* in high-tension showdowns. The World Championships have continued every year since.

2009 POKÉPARK WII: PIKACHU'S ADVENTURE

This cutesy Wii platformer was geared more towards younger audiences than your typical hardcore Pokéfan. *Pikachu's Adventure* features some nice, colourful graphics, a pretty non-perilous story and a host of minigames to get to grips with. The critics weren't wowed, but it did well enough to receive a sequel.

POKÉDEX 387-493

Along with 2006's *Diamond & Pearl* for the Nintendo DS came this new posse of Pokémon. This 107-strong group brought the total roster to 493, just seven short of that half-a-thousand milestone. While this new Generation of Pokémon followed in the footsteps of its predecessors quite rigidly, it was originally speculated that the Grass-Fire-Water triangle of starters was going to be replaced with Dark, Psychic and Fighting, however, Turtwig, Chimchar and Piplup put those theories to rest by keeping it traditional.

Alongside this trio of starters came the usual fare of wild Pokémon archetypes. The usual bird evolution line was catered for by the likes of Starly, Staravia and Staraptor, while the early Normal-type Bidoof followed in the footsteps of Rattata, Sentret and Zigzagoon – though this newcomer was lovably daft-looking. There was also brand-new creations like the hippo-inspired Hippopotas, the yeti-like Abomasnow and, of course, the firm fan-favourite fighter Lucario. Drifloon and Drifblim gained instant notoriety online, too, thanks to their weirdly creepy child-snatching lore entries in the Pokédex. As the new Pokémon were enjoying their popularity, old favourites saw extra evolutions, like Murkrow's new form Honchkrow and Weavile, a grown-up version of Sneasel. Plus, Eevee got two brand-new evolutions after missing out in the last Generation – Leafeon and Glaceon.

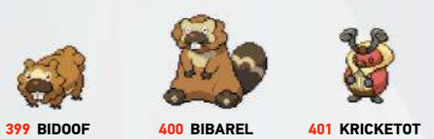
There's a much more 'mythological' and 'godly' feel to this Generation's Pokémon design, which is reflected in the final forms of the starter trio. Infernape resembles Sun Wukong from Chinese mythology, Empoleon conjures up images of Poseidon and Torterra bears a likeness to the World Turtle. This theme becomes crystal clear once you consider Arceus and learn that it is effectively the Pokémon world's version of god and perhaps even the creator of the universe. The two cover star Legendries this Generation, Dialga and Palkia, command time and space respectively, emphasising the larger-than-life mythos the games were cultivating. The box art champion for *Platinum,* Giratina, however, mimics the idea of a 'fallen angel' – the ghostly dragon was said to be banished by Arceus into a different dimension due to its hostile and aggressive nature.

387 TURTWIG 388 GROTLE 389 TORTERRA

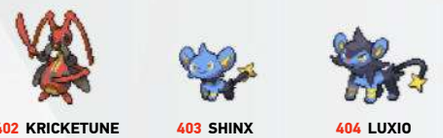
390 CHIMCHAR 391 MONFERNO 392 INFERNAPE

393 PIPLUP 394 PRINPLUP 395 EMPOLEON

396 STARLY 397 STARAVIA 398 STARAPTOR



399 BIDOOF 400 BIBAREL 401 KRICKETOT



402 KRICKETUNE 403 SHINX 404 LUXIO

405 LUXRAY 406 BUDEW 407 ROSERADE 408 CRANIDOS 409 RAMPARDOS 410 SHIELDON 411 BASTIODON 412 BURMY 413 WORMADAM

414 MOTHIM 415 COMBEE 416 VESPIQUEN 417 PACHIRISU 418 BUIZEL 419 FLOATZEL 420 CHERUBI 421 CHERRIM 422 SHELLOS

423 GASTRODON 424 AMBIPOM 425 DRIFLOON 426 DRIFBLIM 427 BUNEARY 428 LOPUNNY 429 MISMAGIUS 430 HONCHKROW 431 GLAMEOW

432 PURUGLY 433 CHINGLING 434 STUNKY 435 SKUNTANK 436 BRONZOR 437 BRONZONG 438 BONSLY

439 MIME JR 440 HAPPINY 441 CHATOT 442 SPIRITOMB 443 GIBLE 444 GABITE 445 GARCHOMP

DID YOU KNOW?

Shellos and Gastrodon have two forms, depending on what side of Sinnoh you see them on. The western versions are pink and the eastern ones are blue.

“The mythological theme becomes crystal clear once you consider Arceus and learn that it is effectively the Pokémon world’s version of god and perhaps even the creator of the universe”

446 MUNCHLAX

447 RIOLU

448 LUCARIO

449 HIPPOPOTAS

450 HIPPOWDON

451 SKORUPI

452 DRAPION

453 CROAGUNK

454 TOXICROAK

455 CARNIVINE

456 FINNEON

457 LUMINEON

458 MANTYKE

459 SNOVER

460 ABOMASNOW

461 WEAVILE

462 MAGNEZONE

463 LICKILICKY

464 RHYPERIOR

465 TANGROWTH

466 ELECTIVIRE

467 MAGMORTAR

468 TOGEKISS

469 YANMEGA

470 LEAFEON

471 GLACEON

472 GLISCOR

473 MAMOSWINE

474 PORYGON-Z

475 GALLADE

476 PROBOPASS

477 DUSKNOIR

478 FROSLASS

479 ROTOM

480 UXIE

481 MESPRIT

482 AZELF

483 DIALGA

484 PALKIA

485 HEATRAN

486 REGIGIGAS

487 GIRATINA

488 CRESSELIA

489 PHIONE

490 MANAPHY

491 DARKRAI

492 SHAYMIN

493 ARCEUS

DID YOU KNOW?

According to a 2020 poll, Lucario is the most loved *Diamond & Pearl* Pokémon, and the second-most popular creature in the entire series, losing out to Greninja.

POKÉMON DIAMOND, PEARL & PLATINUM

Embark on a journey across the Sinnoh region and take on Team Galactic in a bid to save time and space

Words by Rachel Terzian

Pack your Poffin Case, grab your mining gear and wrap up in your warmest winter coat, because it's time to adventure to the region of Sinnoh, home to the fourth Generation of *Pokémon* games and a land steeped in mystery and mythology. Released in Japan in 2006 and the West in 2007, *Pokémon Diamond & Pearl* offered a whole new world of excitement for eager Nintendo DS-owning Trainers.

As you begin your journey, choose between either Dawn or Lucas as your Trainer avatar and set off on an exciting new adventure from the humble town of Twinleaf, also home to your best friend and rival. Get acquainted with Professor Rowan, who specialises in evolution. After he accidentally leaves behind his briefcase full of starter Pokémon at the nearby Lake Verity, you are once again faced with the important choice of selecting your starter Pokémon, your first friend on this brand-new adventure. After choosing between the Grass-type turtle Turtwig, the Fire-type monkey Chimchar or the Water-type penguin Piplup, you fight off a Starly ambush, get gifted a Pokédex and set off on your journey across Sinnoh.

Of course, in order to challenge the Elite Four and become the strongest Trainer in the region, you'll need to form a team of trusty companions to fight alongside you. *Diamond & Pearl* introduced 107 new Pokémon to battle, catch and train, many of which were evolutions (or pre-evolutions) of old favourites from previous Generations. Roselia becomes the even more elegant Roserade when exposed to a Shiny Stone; level up a Lickitung that knows the move Rollout to transform it into the even more hilarious Lickilicky; and hey, if Rhydon isn't quite big and intimidating enough for you as it is, equip it with the Protector item and trade it with

a friend to evolve it into Rhyperior, complete with rock-blasting cannons for arms.

As you make your way across the Sinnoh region's many picturesque locations, you begin to learn more about the region's many myths and legends concerning the very creation of time and space itself. Before long, you encounter members of Team Galactic, a rather eccentric bunch complete with matching spacesuit-like uniforms, identical turquoise-coloured hair and commanders with planetary names. You soon learn they're not to be messed with, either. Their ambitious leader, Cyrus, has some rather disconcerting world views, and in order to achieve his dream of creating a 'perfect' world without suffering (in which he rules as a god, of course) he aims to bring the current world to ruin and replace it with "a world without spirit". And he might have found a way to do it, too.

As you continue to learn more about Team Galactic's plans and conduct your own research into the mythology surrounding Sinnoh, you unearth tales of legends that date back to the creation of the universe. Depending on whether you're playing the *Diamond* or *Pearl* version, you'll encounter the legendary Pokémon Dialga or Palkia – said to be gods of time and space respectively – as well as Uxie, Mesprit and Azelf, known as the 'Lake Guardians' who represent knowledge, emotion and willpower. Team Galactic plans to utilise the powers of these Legendary Pokémon to achieve their sinister, world-ending goals, and it's up to you and your well-trained pals to put a stop to them.

Being the first core-series *Pokémon* games for the Nintendo DS system, *Diamond & Pearl* introduced exciting new features that utilised the console's dual screens, updated graphical prowess, internet connectivity and touchscreen capabilities. For the first time, players could tap with a stylus to select their Pokémon's moves or access their items in battle, and while travelling around the region the touchscreen was also utilised as a handy little Pokémon Watch, or Pokétch. This could display the time, a memo pad, a pedometer (useful for hatching eggs), a Friendship Checker for displaying your bond with your Pokémon, and many other helpful features to assist you on your journey.

When it comes to connecting with fellow Trainers, *Diamond & Pearl* established some game-changing new additions to the series thanks to the Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection service. Linking up with others was no longer restricted to players within a few feet of you. No matter where your friends lived across the globe, battles could take place over Wi-Fi for the very first time, and you could even communicate with them over Voice Chat. Probably the most exciting new addition to the communication features, however, was the Global Trade Station (or GTS). Accessed in Jubilife City, the GTS enabled players to offer their Pokémon up for trade, request what they wanted in return, and if another player from anywhere in the world had what you were after, well, done deal! It was a great way to get your hands on all three starters, any game-exclusive Pokémon (no need to buy both *Diamond & Pearl* versions), and even snag yourself a rare Legendary from some generous soul who happened to have a spare lounging around in their PC Box.

So, what if you need a breather from all this battling and trading? Pokémon Contests, first introduced in *Ruby & Sapphire*, offer an entirely different type of challenge. Here, Contests

» [Nintendo DS] You know things aren't likely to go down well when you're attempting to control the two gods of time and space.

NEW INNOVATIONS

A look at some of the fun new innovations and additions in Gen IV

POKÉMON WATCH (POKÉTCH)

■ The Pokétch has a handy little collection of 25 apps, with most being unlocked as you progress in your adventure. It provides many helpful functions, from keeping track of your Pokémon at the Day Care to locating rare, hidden items with the Dowsing Machine.

WI-FI PLAZA

■ Head downstairs in any Pokémon Center to enter the Wi-Fi Plaza and play minigames with players from around the globe. These minigames involve the use of the touchscreen to, for example, toss Berries into a Swalot's mouth or help keep a little Mime Jr balanced on top of a circus ball.

PHYSICAL/SPECIAL

■ *Diamond & Pearl* were the first *Pokémon* games to designate each move as either a Physical or Special attack. In previous eras, this was simply determined by a move's type (for example, Fighting-type moves were Physical); since Gen IV, each move has its own classification, independent of its type.

VS RECORDER

■ Introduced in *Platinum*, this gave players the ability to record and rewatch battles and even share them over Wi-Fi. You could relive that time you managed to sweep your opponent's entire team with one Pokémon or the moment when a lucky critical hit just barely saved you from defeat.

WI-FI CONNECTIVITY

■ Battles, trades and other fun activities could take place over Wi-Fi, as opposed to just local connection with nearby friends. Battling was still restricted to players with whom you had exchanged Friend Codes, but trading was possible with anyone through the Global Trade Station.

GREETINGS FROM SINNOH

Key locations you'll travel to on your journey across the region

SNOWPOINT CITY

■ Described as a "winter wonderland of a city", Snowpoint is home to the seventh Gym, run by Ice-type specialist Candice. You can also find Snowpoint Temple, home to Legendary Pokémon Regigigas.

BATTLE ZONE

■ This is where the Fight, Resort and Survival Areas are located, for all your battling needs. Head even further north to take the gruelling hike up Stark Mountain, an active volcano where the Legendary Pokémon Heatran resides.

JUBILIFE CITY

■ Jubilife is described as the most modernised city in the region, home to Jubilife TV, the Pokétch Company and the Global Trade Station (or Global Terminal in *Platinum*).

MT CORONET

■ A large centrepiece of the Sinnoh region, connecting major towns and cities, Mt Coronet is a sacred mountain featuring an ancient shrine, known as Spear Pillar, at its peak. It's deeply connected to the game's main story and Team Galactic's chaotic plans.

VEILSTONE CITY

■ Shop at the Department Store, play at the Game Corner, or take on the Fighting-type Gym Leader Maylene. It's also pretty hard to ignore the imposing presence of the Team Galactic HQ building...

were expanded even further – renamed Super Contests, they featured new rounds where Pokémon were judged according to their appearance and dancing ability as well as the appeal of their moves, creating a more fun and varied competition.

There's plenty of fun to be had even beneath the surface of the region too. After an encounter with the aptly named Underground Man in Eterna City, players were gifted the Explorer Kit, enabling access to Sinnoh's sprawling Underground system whenever you fancied doing a spot of mining. With your trusty hammer and pickaxe at the ready, you could dig your way through the walls to unearth a number of treasures, fossils and rare items, including special Spheres that could be sold for other goods, such as decorations to spruce up your own personal Secret Base.

Utilising the Nintendo DS's Wi-Fi connection, you could invite your friends to your Secret Base, showing-off your collection of Pokémon plushies and other decorations you'd worked hard to collect. Your friends probably had other priorities, though; once they were in your base they had the opportunity to steal your flag, with the aim of successfully taking it back to their own base for rewards. Not if you had anything to say about it, of course. With the use of some fiendishly placed traps, any visitors to your Secret Base would soon find that capturing your flag was no easy task – depending on the trap you forced them into, your friends could be sent flying, have their controls messed up, or even find themselves immobilised in fire (or bubbles, for a less violent approach). Then you could sit back and watch as your friends frantically blew into the DS's microphone to extinguish the flames or tapped on the touchscreen to escape.

Following the trend of previous generations, a third instalment of the Generation IV games was released in 2008 (2009 in the West) – *Pokémon Platinum*. Essentially an upgraded, refined version of *Diamond & Pearl*, the game was once again set in the Sinnoh region, which is now notably covered in much more snow than it was previously – with Lucas and Dawn dressing up in some more winter-appropriate attire to match. Although there were no drastic changes when compared to *Diamond & Pearl*'s core game elements, there were some very welcome upgrades, including new sprite animations, nifty Gym redesigns and, in a similar vein to *Pokémon Emerald*, the addition of a challenging Battle Frontier for you to take on once you'd completed the main story.

Speaking of the game's story, *Pokémon Platinum* added some important new plot elements, further exploring the legends of the region's creation and this time giving a more prominent role to the Ghost/Dragon Legendary Giratina, who featured on the box art in a new 'Origin Forme'. When Cyrus summons Dialga and Palkia at the Spear Pillar as a means to fulfilling his ominous plans, Giratina feels it's high time to step in, taking Cyrus to the Distortion World, Giratina's true home – an alternate dimension devoid of spirit.

Traversing this world was unlike any other experience in a *Pokémon* game; after all, the Distortion World is an alternate universe where the usual rules of physics simply don't apply. Walk upside down on floating pillars, surf vertically up a streaming waterfall, and float your way across the creepily materialising and dematerialising terrain – all while listening to a chilling, melancholic soundtrack occasionally interrupted by the cries of Giratina itself. After making your way through this otherworldly dimension, you're given the opportunity to catch Giratina in its Origin Forme. Cyrus, meanwhile, vows to have revenge.

Have we ignited an urge to go back and revisit these games, or experience them for the first time? Well, after many requests from fans who wish to see these much-loved games in a modern light, we can now journey back to Sinnoh once again. 15 years since *Diamond & Pearl*'s release, Nintendo announced the remakes, *Brilliant Diamond & Shining Pearl*, which should be on store shelves as you read this, for the Nintendo Switch. The new games upgrade the Sinnoh region with a brand-new look that still remains faithful to the originals. And to add to the excitement, a second Sinnoh-based title was also announced alongside titled *Pokémon Legends: Arceus*. Scheduled for 2022 and set many years in the past, the game looks to be taking an even deeper dive into Sinnoh's many myths and legends, this time focusing on the god-like Mythic Pokémon Arceus.

With the unveiling of these two exciting new games, the future certainly looks exciting for fans of the Generation IV originals. We certainly cannot wait to relive our many adventures and start some new ones across the Sinnoh region, all these years later!

» [Nintendo DS] The Nintendo DS's touchscreen enabled some bold new changes to the main battle interface, with moves and items easily accessible.

GENERATION V

2010–2013

UNOVA REGION

By now, Pokémon was well-established and felt like it could do with a shake-up, so this era decided to do things a little differently…

The fifth Generation of *Pokémon* is pretty remarkable. As the years rolled by since the franchise's debut in 1996, a growing number of people began to note that each new era began to feel like more of the same. And they were right in thinking that – the games hadn't exactly deviated from the formula established in the early days; sure, *Diamond & Pearl* introduced innovations such as online play, but that wasn't enough. So, for this new Generation of *Pokémon*, Game Freak decided to mix things up a bit.

You could argue that 2010's *Black & White* versions were a 'soft reboot' for the mainline game series. They were bold in that they were set on an entirely different continent, a region that wasn't inspired by Japan, and they only initially let you capture Pokémon that debuted in this Generation. That's right, no sea of Zubats swirling around in caves or legions of Oddishes waiting for you in the long grass: this time you had to pick up a Woobat (they could've at least named that one differently) or Sewaddle. It was a bold move and one that made *Black & White* stand out as more confident follow-ups compared to their peers. If that wasn't enough, *Black & White* were the first games in the series to have numbered sequels that continued the story: *Black 2 & White 2*.

While the mainline game series saw a sweeping shake-up, the rest of the *Pokémon* world remained the same. Card game expansions were still being issued, the various spin-off series soldiered on with varying degrees of success, and the anime was as evergreen as usual. Things did get a little different on the cartoon side of things, however. As this Generation came to a close, a miniseries based on the original *Red & Green/Blue* was aired, offering something old yet new for the franchise.

2010 POKÉMON BLACK & WHITE

The new mainline games were the most confident yet. By only letting you encounter previous Pokémon once you'd hit the credits, *Black & White* put its new monsters in the spotlight and as a result felt like an actual follow-up. The games also blended animated sprites and 3D environments beautifully.

2010 POKÉMON THE SERIES: BLACK & WHITE

This series, like most of the recent anime, aired just in time for the release of *Black & White* on DS. It again follows Ash as he travels around the new Unova region. He is accompanied by two newcomers who featured in the games: Iris, an aspiring Dragon Master, and Cilan, an 'A Class Pokémon Connoisseur'.

2010 POKÉMON GLOBAL LINK

This website debuted in Generation V and provided extra online functionality to the main *Pokémon* games for ten years – it shut down in February 2020. Notably, Global Link was host to *Dream World*, an online web-browser-based game that let you send a Pokémon from your copy of *Black* or *White* to the internet.

2011 LEARN WITH POKÉMON: TYPING ADVENTURE

Bundled with a keyboard, this DS title aspired to teach gamers the intricacies of typing. It gamified lessons, having you type Pokémon names rapidly in order to capture them, with professor 'Quentin Werty' helping you along the way… very funny.

2011 POKÉDEX 3D

In 2011, Nintendo released its new handheld, the Nintendo 3DS, and with it came a host of free software including this curio. *Pokédex 3D* showcased the Unova Pokémon in, well, 3D. Using the console's excellent SpotPass function, you could unlock more entries as you strolled around your surroundings with the portable console in Sleep Mode.

2012 POKÉMON BLACK 2 & WHITE 2

The first direct sequels in the main series, *Black 2 & White 2* followed on directly from the first *Black & White* games, albeit with new player characters. Now the new roster of Pokémon had settled in, these follow-ups let you catch creatures from different Generations from the very beginning.

2012 POKÉMON DREAM RADAR

Another 3DS app here, but this one is interesting thanks to its use of augmented reality. Acting as a proto-*Pokémon Go*, you were able to identify and capture Pokémon in the real world using the 3D's dual cameras. You could then transfer any Pokémon you'd wrangled to *Pokémon Black 2 & White 2*.

2012 POKÉMON CONQUEST

Crossing Pokémon over with the high-strategy stakes of *Nobunaga's Ambition* sounds like a strange concept, but we live in a world where *Kingdom Hearts* is a thing, so it should come as no surprise to learn this hybrid works wonders. Deep, tactical and packed with Pokémon, this DS classic is a spin-off worth exploring.

2013 POKÉ DOLLS

Pokémon plushies were *far* from new in 2013, but these uniform cute and cuddly critters produced by The Pokémon Company come in six- or 12-inch versions and feature Pokémon from across all the Generations. They're named after an in-game item you use to escape wild Pokémon encounters, but they won't get you out of a real-life Spearow attack though.

2013 POKÉMON ORIGINS

The likes of Ash Ketchum and Pikachu are nowhere to be seen in this special miniseries, which focuses on the events of the original *Pokémon Red & Green* Game Boy games. Well, we should say it's *mostly* based on the originals, because *Origins* teases a new feature that would appear in the next Generation of *Pokémon*: Mega Evolutions.

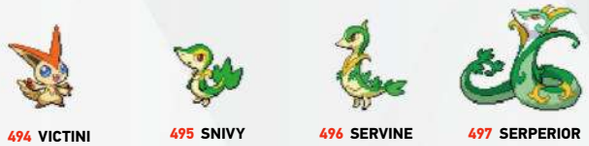
POKÉDEX 494-649

Say hello to the biggest Generation of Pokémon! With *Pokémon Black & White* came a whopping 156 new creatures to capture, making this the most ambitious Pokédex expansion for the series. Designed as sort of a soft reboot, *Black & White*'s Pokémon mirrored some of the original 151 – Woobat and Zubat, for example, or Roggenrola and Geodude – and for good reason: none of the old guard could be encountered in the games until you'd beaten Unova's Elite Four.

Like their host games' names might imply, a core theme of this Generation was duality. This is perhaps best shown off in the two Legendary Pokémon Reshiram and Zekrom, which play into the whole 'light' and 'dark' motif in a not-so-subtle way. The games they starred in were flipped, though: with the light-coloured Reshiram showcased in the *Black* version and darker Zekrom in *White*, thematically creating a Yin-Yang symbol.

The non-Legendary Pokémon were a diverse menagerie, featuring a healthy spread of types and dual-types to avoid any balancing issues. As per usual, the trio of starters was a cute bunch that evolved into three mighty contenders – through bafflingly for the third time in a row, the Fire evolution line (Tepig, Pignite and Emboar) once again gained Fighting as a secondary type.

A number of these Unnova region natives featured an array of variant designs, too. The male and female versions of Unfezant look remarkably different, for instance, mimicking real-life birds and their mating rituals. Deerling and Sawsbuck also had four different forms based on what season you caught one in – emphasising the new seasonal feature in the games.



494 VICTINI | 495 SNIVY | 496 SERVINE | 497 SERPERIOR

498 TEPIG | 499 PIGNITE | 500 EMBOAR | 501 OSHAWOTT

502 DEWOTT | 503 SAMUROTT | 504 PATRAT | 505 WATCHOG

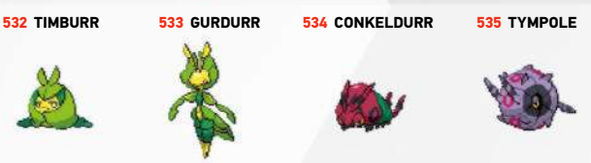
506 LILLIPUP | 507 HERDIER | 508 STOUTLAND | 509 PURRLOIN

510 LIEPARD | 511 PANSAGE | 512 SIMISAGE | 513 PANSEAR

514 SIMISEAR | 515 PANPOUR | 516 SIMIPOUR | 517 MUNNA

518 MUSHARNA | 519 PIDOVE | 520 TRANQUILL | 521 UNFEZANT | 522 BLITZLE | 523 ZEBSTRIKA | 524 ROGGENROLA | 525 BOLDORE | 526 GIGALITH

527 WOOBAT | 528 SWOOBAT | 529 DRILBUR | 530 EXCADRILL | 531 AUDINO | 532 TIMBURR | 533 GURDURR | 534 CONKELDURR | 535 TYMPOLE



536 PALPITOAD | 537 SEISMITOAD | 538 THROH | 539 SAWK | 540 SEWADDLE | 541 SWADLOON | 542 LEAVANNY | 543 VENIPEDE | 544 WHIRLIPEDE

545 SCOLIPEDE | 546 COTTONEE | 547 WHIMSICOTT | 548 PETILIL | 549 LILLIGANT | 550 BASCULIN | 551 SANDILE

552 KROKOROK | 553 KROOKODILE | 554 DARUMAKA | 555 DARMANITAN | 556 MARACTUS | 557 DWEBBLE | 558 CRUSTLE

DID YOU KNOW?

Darumaka's name and shape both resemble a Daruma doll. These are modelled after the Buddhist monk Bodhidharma, a key figure in the 'Zen' tradition.

559 SCRAGGY

560 SCRAFTY

561 SIGILYPH

562 YAMASK

563 COFAGRIGUS

564 TIRTOUGA

565 CARRACOSTA

566 ARCHEN

567 ARCHEOPS

568 TRUBBISH

569 GARBODOR

570 ZORUA

571 ZOROARK

572 MINCCINO

573 CINCCINO

574 GOTHITA

575 GOTHORITA

576 GOTHITELLE

577 SOLOSIS

578 DUOSION

579 REUNICLUS

580 DUCKLETT

581 SWANNA

582 VANILLITE

583 VANILLISH

584 VANILLUXE

585 DEERLING

586 SAWSBUCK

587 EMOLGA

588 KARRABLAST

589 ESCAVALIER

590 FOONGUS

591 AMOONGUSS

592 FRILLISH

593 JELLICENT

594 ALOMOMOLA

595 JOLTIK

596 GALVANTULA

597 FERROSEED

598 FERROTHORN

599 KLINK

600 KLANG

601 KLINKLANG

602 TYNAMO

603 EELEKTRIK

604 EELEKTROSS

605 ELGYEM

606 BEHEEYEM

607 LITWICK

608 LAMPENT

609 CHANDELURE

610 AXEW

611 FRAXURE

612 HAXORUS

613 CUBCHOO

614 BEARTIC

615 CRYOGONAL

616 SHELMET

617 ACCELGOR

618 STUNFISK

619 MIENFOO

620 MIENSHAO

621 DRUDDIGON

622 GOLETT

623 GOLURK

624 PAWNIARD

625 BISHARP

626 BOUFFALANT

627 RUFFLET

628 BRAVIARY

629 VULLABY

630 MANDIBUZZ

631 HEATMOR

632 DURANT

633 DEINO

634 ZWEILOUS

635 HYDREIGON

636 LARVESTA

637 VOLCARONA

638 COBALION

639 TERRAKION

640 VIRIZION

641 TORNADUS

642 THUNDURUS

643 RESHIRAM

644 ZEKROM

645 LANDORUS

646 KYUREM

647 KELDEO

648 MELOETTA

649 GENESECT

DID YOU KNOW?

Much like Voltorb, Foongus developed a Poké Ball-like appearance in order to disguise itself. In the games, you can accidentally mistake an item for one.

POKÉMON BLACK & WHITE

Game Freak boldly reinvented Pokémon with this pair of Nintendo DS classics. We remember a trip to the studio ahead of the games' release to uncover what makes Black & White such revered entries in the series

***Black & White*. Where once stood evocative colours, precious metals and various gemstones for potential players to align themselves with, the fifth Generation brought with it the most extreme branding yet.** Light and darkness, good and evil, absolutes and nothingness… you were no longer picking a point along a line based on personal preference, but choosing an end of the spectrum to represent. And this shift wasn't just one of branding. It was indicative of the biggest shake-up to the series at the time, both in terms of differences between the pair of versions and in terms of changes between game Generations. So, while the biggest difference between the two versions might previously have been whether or not you could catch Bellsprout, *Black & White* went as far as to offer exclusive areas, battles and characters, as they pushed the franchise forward and demonstrated just how much more the Nintendo DS had to offer.

But before we discuss quite how so many of *Pokémon*'s staple mechanics were improved, built upon and in some cases rebuilt entirely, it's probably best that we tackle the biggest change first. Before *Black & White*'s additional 156 monsters, the Pokédex stood at an impressive

» [Nintendo DS] Pitting tiny starters against the game's most formidable beasts? Somebody evidently doesn't have a clue what they're doing...

» [Nintendo DS] *Black & White* gave you a friendly rivalry with two characters, Bianca (pictured above) and Cheren.

493 different creatures to catch and raise, many with variants and subspecies to discover. But had you caught them all? Because if you hadn't, *Black & White* was going to make you wait some time before the new games give you access to the old faces.

Ridiculous? Brave? Crazy? Pointless? Having worked so hard to cement Pikachu and friends as household names, Game Freak's decision to use exclusively original monsters for the fifth Generation of *Pokémon* games has been described as many things, though, having discussed the decision with the team, we're more inclined to lean towards the complimentary. "In creating games that are very similar to one another, they're usually going to look very similar too, so that was the first challenge we faced. We wanted to somehow make it very different to the previous games, so we started to think about how to add new elements to the game and convey to the audience how new the experience is," explained Ken Sugimori, art director and designer of the original set of monsters when we first spoke to him ahead of *Black & White*'s release. "We got a mission from Mr Masuda, stating that every Pokémon in this game had to be brand new, so no existing Pokémon appear in the game. This was a huge challenge and, to support it, we also had to ▶

▶ create a world that was completely different from the existing games. In the *Pokémon* world, there are monsters that look like dogs, like horses, like deer… it should be obvious that we always draw inspiration from the animal kingdom when creating new Pokémon. The research we did was to take the designers to the zoo to study different animals."

This sounds like the kind of research we can get behind, and, going through the new monsters that were added, we have to assume that everyone had ice cream as part of this lovely day out and one of the less switched-on designers mistook it for an animal and based a Pokémon on it – Vanillite evolves from a blob into an ice cream cone (Vanillish) and culminates as a double-scoop destroyer (Vanilluxe). Between the kitsch value of a newcomer like this, and the host of far more traditional and well-imagined monsters, it's a solid line-up, though we couldn't help but ask Sugimori – whose skilled pen hand produced all of the official art for the new monsters – about the perils of leaving old friends behind. "I totally agree; it's a risk. Often I consulted with Mr Masuda about it, as it was his idea to use only new Pokémon and we didn't agree on it initially," he revealed. "But in Japan, we had great feedback from critics and the audience because it's all fresh. In order to reduce the risk of having only new monsters, the design team would put each individual Pokémon up on the wall so we could see them alongside the originals. There are over 500 Pokémon, and obviously they're not all created by one person – more than 30 people work on that aspect of the game and each one of them will have personal feelings or attachment to specific Pokémon that they created."

It's not as though the decision to big up the new monsters was made hastily, either. *Black & White*'s director, the aforementioned Junichi Masuda, explained a little about the genesis of the project. "The original concept began [around 2006] but it was only myself on planning and seven coders at the beginning of the project," he revealed. "The programmers were researching new functions and elements we could get out of the DS system and I thought that since a lot of people see *Pokémon* as a game targeted at children, I wanted to open it up to a broader audience. We know there will be players that have never played a *Pokémon* game before as well as those that have, so we wanted to target both groups equally. In order to do so, we decided to create an all-new set of monsters for these games."

But this in itself did away with some long-standing traditions between versions, not least the introduction of new evolutions and baby versions of existing monsters. We've seen previously underused monsters like Magneton, Togetic and Rhydon offered a new lease of competitive life with powerful evolved forms, had further options for Pokémon like good ol' versatile Eevee, and imagined corporate eyes turning to dollar signs as the hyper-cute likes of Pichu and Igglybuff join the cast, though Sugimori did suggest to us that while it might not have been possible with a brand-new cast, more evolutions was a possibility for further down the line.

While a lot of the changes seemed to focus on reaching out to new players, *Black & White* can sit with the greats in their ability to open doors at both ends of the spectrum. Competitive battling is big business in the land of *Pokémon*, but in order to ensure that the metagame was kept fresh, the fifth Generation saw some pretty major alterations. The first was the downplaying of Stealth Rock, a passive damage attack that almost single-handedly made many Fire, Flying and Bug monsters slip off the battling scene altogether – in a sign of the direction

» Sugimori was as reserved as he is talented, though he seemed to have a lot to say when we asked about *Pokémon*'s early years.

Game Freak wanted things to go, there's no Technical Machine for the overpowered attack this time, and only a few native monsters were be able to learn it naturally. Something so pervasive was clearly tough to retcon effectively and fairly, though it was promising indeed that the team was looking to the competitive scene and trying to open it up to a wider range of monsters.

"We've been looking at a lot of tournaments, and more and more people seem to be playing on that kind of competitive level. So that's one thing, players training to be better battlers – EV training and raising strong Pokémon," confirmed Masuda. "But at the same time, there are players that would like to play at that level but, when they lose, that's it. That's just not something we can ignore, so we wanted to add features to ensure that even players that have lost can enjoy the game. If we focus too much on the core player, we might lose those beginners altogether. The balance is really difficult."

> **"When I see a lot of people using the same Pokémon with the same moves, that's when I want to make changes"**
> Junichi Masuda

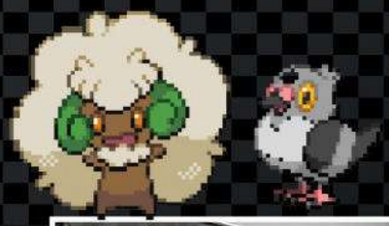
Whether due to competitive reasons or to make them more useful in the single-player adventures, pretty much every Pokémon saw some degree of change to their move pools. So far, so standard – but on top of the moveset tweaks, Game Freak went far further than usual in making changes to the attacks themselves. Across the board, there were power boosts and nerfs to underused or exploited moves respectively, again a direction to offer a greater percentage of the cast competitive viability. "When I see a lot of people using the same Pokémon with the same moves, that's when I want to make changes," Masuda told us. "We want to see more diverse parties and moves. So we'll come up with new Pokémon and moves that can counter the common choices." To this end, many multi-turn attacks like Outrage and Uproar saw significant boosts, while multi-hit attacks like Icicle Spear got a basic power boost, which helped many more monsters deal with defensive moves like Substitute a little better. There were also an arsenal of new moves and some useful new abilities and type combinations that went some way to dealing with the common threats Masuda mentioned, and, even if none of this works out for you, perhaps the lure of a pair of all-new battle types will be enough to get you excited.

Just as *Ruby & Sapphire* introduced the idea of teams of two Pokémon battling it out at once, *Black & White* took things one louder again with Triple Battles. These were the most complex way to battle yet, a whole new ruleset determining which opponents a monster can hit based on its position on the field. In truth, it wasn't as complicated as it sounds. Each Pokémon could target the one directly opposite or those adjacent, effectively only meaning that you can't hit from corner to corner, though this also had the effect of increasing the importance of the central position – only the Pokémon in the middle of your trio were able to hit all of the opponent's monsters at once with moves like Surf, while they themselves could be targeted by all three rivals. There was also the option to do Rotation Battles, effectively a regular one-on-one showdown but with your team of three laid bare for your opponent to see and switching between them not taking a whole turn like it did in a regular battle. "Triple Battle especially is something we think that hardcore players would enjoy, since it required a lot more strategy to battle effectively," Masuda told us. "Core players always ask why we don't add more types so that battles can be more complex. But by creating the Triple Battle, we hoped we had introduced something that would satisfy these players. We're looking ▶

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

How Manhattan inspired the design of the Unnova region

Like each of the main series entries before it,* Black & White *took players to a whole new part of the ever-growing* Pokémon *world. But what inspired the team to create such a different setting to previous games? "For this new region, I was inspired by New York and in particular Manhattan," Masuda told us. "I visited when* Diamond & Pearl *first launched and I had a chance to wander around. And as I walked the streets, I saw all these different people, festivals, events going on everywhere – people from lots of different places coexisting in one community, which inspired a lot of* Black & White*. New York is a very international city and, at the same time, you've got children, adults, workers, tourists... all these types of people coexisting in one place. Also, I visited the United Nations in New York, which is a unique place. It's in the US, in New York, but it brings together people from all over the world, which was very inspiring for me. Pokémon and people... can we create the same kind of borderless community in the* Pokémon *world? No borders between Pokémon and people – that's the ideal world in my mind – so we tried to create this perfect world in the videogames."



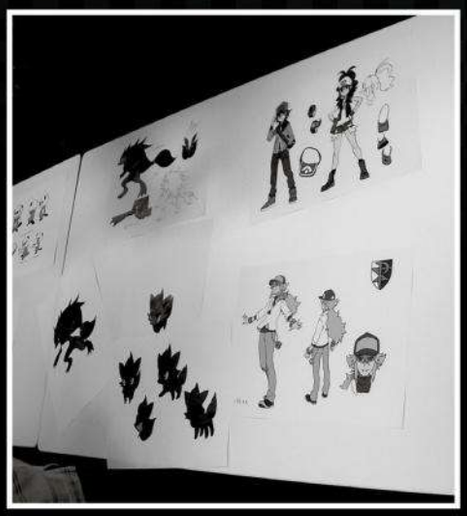
▶ forward to seeing what kind of cool strategies players will come up with in these new modes."

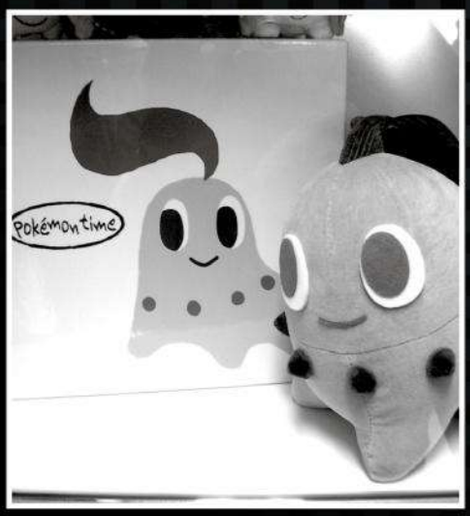
But battling is only part of the *Pokémon* experience, and Game Freak was eager to show equal evolution in every aspect. Each chapter in the main *Pokémon* franchise has brought with it innovations to some degree or another – *Gold & Silver* gave us changes based on real world time, *Ruby & Sapphire* gave each monster an ability that changed how they interacted, *Diamond & Pearl* split all moves into Physical and Special types to really open up the game... but what did *Black & White* bring to the proverbial table?

For one thing, the duo built on the real-time mechanic with a functional calendar and cycling seasons. Speeding through spring, summer, autumn and winter at the rate of one per month, this added yet another incentive for continued play and predictably, select monsters only came out to play at certain times of the in-game year – if, for instance, you were after a particularly frigid Pokémon (one that looked like an ice cream, perhaps), you likely had to wait for a virtual winter to roll around before it poked its (presumably ice cream-esque) head out of hiding.

But that virtual snowfall did a lot more than just send some monsters into hibernation and brought others out of their homes (or ice cream vans). It was initially speculated that heavy snowfall might block certain areas or create slopes that enable seasonal access to others, with each time of year offering similar slight

» [Nintendo DS] Battles still used 2D sprites, however all the Pokémon had rudimentary animations and shadows, giving the scenes more depth compared to previous Generations.





alterations to the world. Gamers didn't need to expect floods to block key routes or impede story progress, though, but when they ventured off the beaten track, *Black & White*'s far more organic world of Unova threw the occasional curveball their way.

Changes to the world in which the games take place are one thing, but some of the most interesting additions to *Black & White* allowed instant and/or constant communication with other Trainers all around the real world. The C-Gear occupied the touchscreen and offered no shortage of methods for communicating with other players no matter how close or far away they might have been. For long-distance interaction, users could connect to the Pokémon Global Link and, from there, players could try their skills against the world's best Trainers, arrange trades or even mess around with a few more interesting and original features – the Dream World, for instance, enabled you to link a monster directly to a bespoke website where you could explore its dreams in an attempt to befriend even more Pokémon (some of which had unique abilities that they wouldn't usually be able to possess) via a PC, with this also used as the distribution method for new event Pokémon.

A little closer to home, the C-Gear also had options for both wireless and infrared communication, the former being a DS standard while the latter employed extra tech in each cart for super-fast connection on the fly. "We've taken advantage of IR technology to make it easier for players to communicate with one ▶

> **"Core players always ask why we don't add more types so that battles can be more complex"**
> Junichi Masuda

ONE DOWN, 648 TO GO...

Which starter will you take on your journey?

SNIVY

TYPE: GRASS
HEIGHT: 2'00" **WEIGHT:** 17.9LBS

■ Your smug-looking snake-like new friend, Snivy follows in the footsteps of Bulbasaur, Chikorita et al in being the only starter that will gain access to self-healing moves. Leech Seed and Mega Drain are learned pretty early, and since the first Gym Leader will counter-pick your starter regardless of which you go for, its first real challenge will be the third Gym and its Bug-type residents. Snivy's final evolution is a majestic pure-Grass serpent that sacrifices a little offensive power for an impressive Speed stat. Splendid.

TEPIG

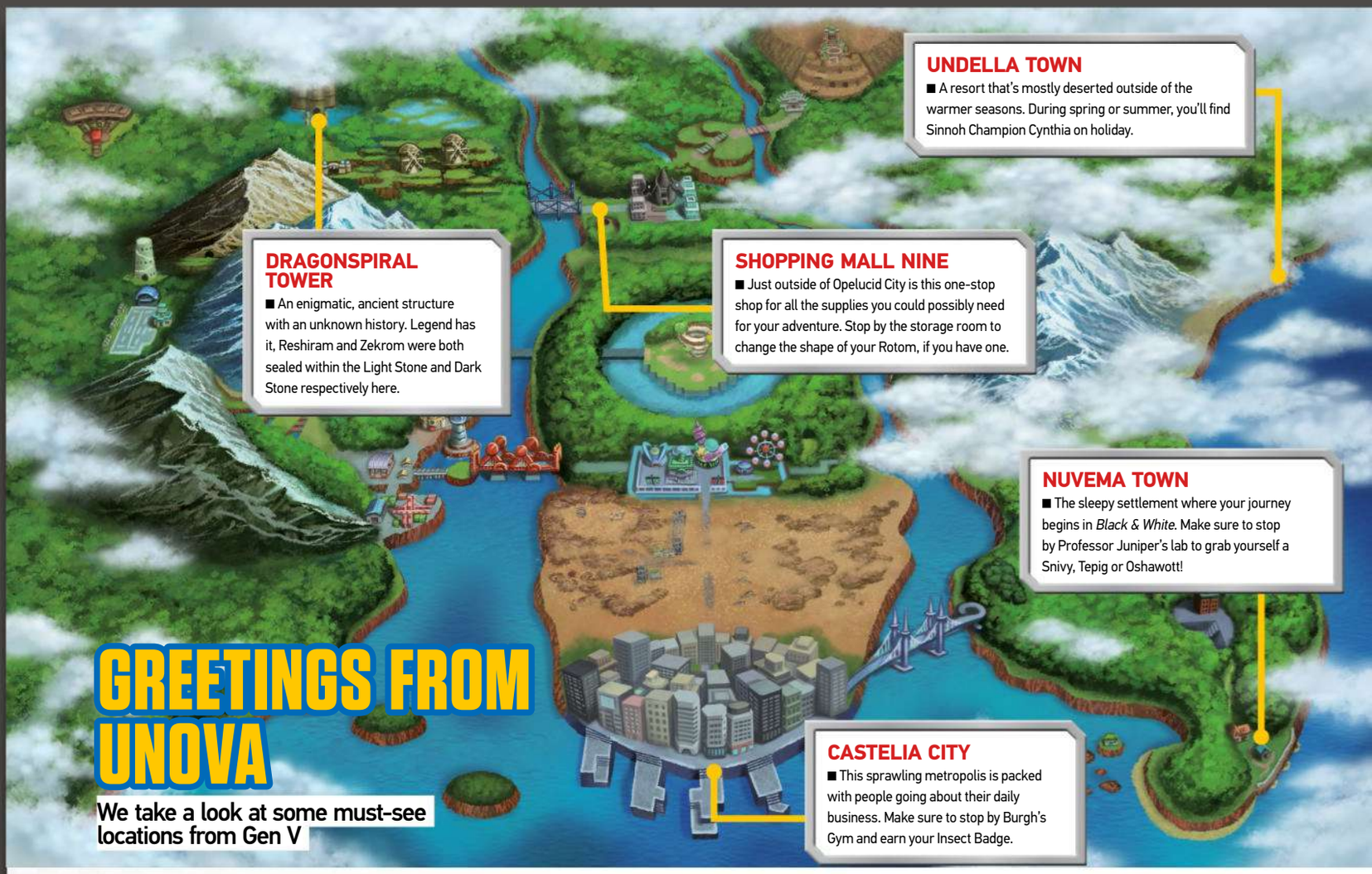
TYPE: FIRE
HEIGHT: 1'08" **WEIGHT:** 21.8LBS

■ The Fire starter, twisted Fire starter. Sorry. Still, Tepig is a cheeky bovine pyromaniac that will serve hotheaded Trainers well. When it evolves, it stands upright and adopts the Fighting type in addition to its natural Fire type (similar to Torchic's road to becoming Blaziken), later growing into a hulking great boar thing with a focus on attack power at the expense of defensive strength. With Infernape and Blaziken both already serving this role, though, we're not sure that additional type won't hurt him more than it helps...

OSHAWOTT

TYPE: WATER
HEIGHT: 1'08" **WEIGHT:** 13.0LBS

■ Our personal pick of the three, Oshawott always seems to look a little miserable, and that just endears it to us more. It gets the benefit of learning a surprise Bug move early on to catch out Grass types that might otherwise mess him up, though many of his natural moves tend to work off his Attack rather than his stronger Special Attack stat. He evolves into... well, we're not really sure what he evolves into. But it's spiky. And statistically speaking, it's the most balanced of the three in its final form.


UNDELLA TOWN
■ A resort that's mostly deserted outside of the warmer seasons. During spring or summer, you'll find Sinnoh Champion Cynthia on holiday.
DRAGONSPIRAL TOWER
■ An enigmatic, ancient structure with an unknown history. Legend has it, Reshiram and Zekrom were both sealed within the Light Stone and Dark Stone respectively here.
SHOPPING MALL NINE
■ Just outside of Opelucid City is this one-stop shop for all the supplies you could possibly need for your adventure. Stop by the storage room to change the shape of your Rotom, if you have one.
NUVEMA TOWN
■ The sleepy settlement where your journey begins in *Black & White*. Make sure to stop by Professor Juniper's lab to grab yourself a Snivy, Tepig or Oshawott!
CASTELIA CITY
■ This sprawling metropolis is packed with people going about their daily business. Make sure to stop by Burgh's Gym and earn your Insect Badge.

GREETINGS FROM UNOVA

We take a look at some must-see locations from Gen V

» [Nintendo DS] You could transfer your older Pokémon to *Black & White* once you'd obtained the National Pokédex.

» [Nintendo DS] Feeling lonely? Schedule a video chat with the Professor and your pals to catch up.

> **"Young kids will be more curious and eager to talk about Pokémon and trade with others, whereas older players are more likely to do their trading online"**
> Junichi Masuda

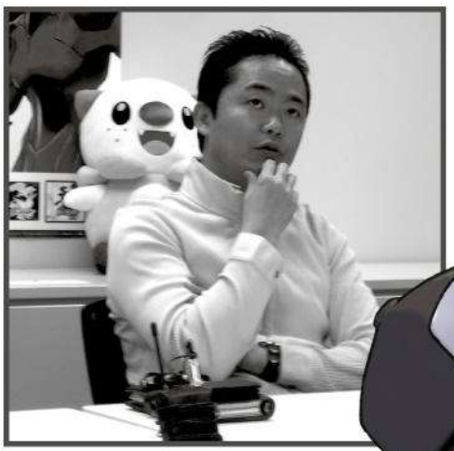
▶ another," said Masuda, explaining how this manner of communication could enable instant on-the-fly trades and battles without the need for menus. "We decided we should add cool new features incorporating the latest technologies so that even older players would see it as cool to play *Pokémon*." In our previous experience of connecting *Heart Gold & Soul Silver* to the Pokéwalker, we had to question the stability of the IR connection for something as complex battle, though conceded to ability to trade monsters in a as a useful It was good to Pokémon was still lip service to its trading roots, at least. "It's like we're cutting out the local communications where you get together and play – it's just that the communication style is different between older and younger players," reasoned Masuda. "Young kids will be more curious and eager to talk about *Pokémon* and trade with others, whereas older players are more likely to do their trading online. So by improving online integration, we're trying to ensure that older players are able to better enjoy the game."

The wealth of communication options was probably the most impressive showcased by any DS game to date, though the deeper we dug into the ways in which *Black & White* communicated, the more we started to see many of the features as some (admittedly handy) foreshadowing of the features touted by the-then upcoming 3DS. Game Freak was doing software-side what the 3DS hardware enables developers to easily bolt onto any game. Tag mode let you share details with others merely by passing them, the Xtransceiver allowed for in-game communication with distant players (or, more curiously, local ones) and even elsewhere, in elements like the verticality of many of the games' cities, you can't escape the idea that *Black & White*

NO GREY AREA

How Game Freak made each version distinct

"We see* Black *and* White *as opposites," Masuda told us. "*Black *stands for urban while* White *has more natural themes." Unlike previous pairs of games, even the same location differed between* Black *and* White *versions in just the way Masuda described –* Black *portrayed many areas as far more built-up and man-made whereas* White *boasted far more foliage and a chilled out vibe. Whole areas could change between versions, too, with Black City and White Forest exclusive to their relevant versions and offering different types of gameplay for visitors. Masuda explained the team's decision: "If you live in a big city, you might prefer to go camping and enjoy nature, but, if you live out in the countryside, you're more likely to be excited by a big city. We're not really saying that one is better than the other – both are necessary for human beings."



might once have been headed to 3DS. And while Game Freak was clearly tight-lipped about what it's up to behind the scenes with Nintendo's new hardware at the time, Masuda at least explained what he saw in the then-new handheld. "The main feature of 3DS is the communication aspect, so that couldn't be a better fit," he said. "That's something that we'd certainly like to focus on." Was Game Freak testing the water in order to hit the ground running when it turned its attention to 3DS, or is was just the natural evolution of *Pokémon*'s communicative elements? Our answer was unclear, though we guessed that it was a combination of the two. "In Japan we have a lot of events where you can go to a venue and play games, so I'd like people to enjoy this new kind of social functionality in *Black & White*," Sugimori told us, bigging up the connectivity once more. "But also, because I have designed so many new characters, I hope players will find a new favourite."

And while some may have looked over the new faces and muttered something about barrel-scraping, others were so blinded by love for one of the newcomers that they didn't even care what the other 155 looked like. In any case, to reach just one creature shy of 650 unique and vastly customisable characters in an RPG was an unprecedented feat, and, as with anything so broad, there were always going to be peaks and troughs. We never fully appreciated the comedy value of Pokémon like Mr Mime and Slowpoke back in the day – and their true worth didn't shine through until they'd eventually been fleshed out by other branches of the *Pokémon* franchise – so we were willing to give almost all of the new monsters that haven't won us over the benefit of the doubt and the chance to do so in spin-off games, animation and those all-important toys, and it turns out that they did and some are enduring favourites to this day.

It's telling that ten years after they arrived, that *Black & White* are still so fondly remembered. They marked the biggest shake-up the franchise had ever seen, and no mainline Pokémon game has come even close to replicating the bold strokes that Game Freak painted when creating these two modern classics. The legacy of *Black & White* is huge, both as a creative zenith and a bold reimagining for *Pokémon* as a whole.

A pair of sequels arrived two years later, *Black 2 & White 2*, a first for the series. These follow-ups continued the story established in the originals in a confident way, introducing the scientist Colress and his fascination with the Legendary Dragon Kyurem. They differed from the games that came before by placing you in a new starting area and let you capture non-Unova Pokémon from the start. These follow-ups were received better than the usual 'third' version thanks to their generous offerings of fresh content, so it's a shame the sequel concept was never revisited. ✱

POKÉMON ORIGINS

This short-and-sweet series is for lovers of the anime and games alike

Fans of the *Pokémon* anime had journeyed with Ash and Pikachu almost exclusively, however, things differed a little in 2013 with this limited four-episode miniseries.

Pokémon Origins is a different beast from the main animated series; instead, it takes its inspiration directly from the original Game Boy games. You won't find any daft Pokémon repeatedly uttering their name over and over here, or the dramatic motto that preludes every Team Rocket entrance: this series focuses purely on an aspiring Pokémon Master called Red as he seeks to win every Gym Badge in the Kanto region and challenge the Elite Four. Further cementing the idea that this is a miniseries for the fans who first clutched a Game Boy loaded with *Pokémon Red*, *Green* or *Blue*, *Origins* begins with a 'New Game' selection screen followed by a nostalgic introduction from the very first Pokémon boffin, Professor Oak.

The series expanded on certain details and lore of the *Pokémon* game world, which was a treat for fans. For example, did you ever wonder why some Gym Leaders had low-level Pokémon, while others had super-strong fully evolved creatures? Well, as *Origins* tells us, it's all based around how many Badges the challenger is holding. Brock notices Red doesn't have a Badge yet, so he moderates his choice of Pokémon accordingly.

Origins also offered a taste of what's to come. As it debuted just before the sixth Generation of *Pokémon*, it showed off a brand-new feature that was set to appear in the then-impending *Pokémon X & Y*: Mega Evolutions. Shown off in a climactic battle, where Red's Charizard is almost vanquished by the legendary Mewtwo, the fiery dragon evolves into Mega Charizard X to turn the tide.

Brief but brilliant, *Pokémon Origins* is a fascinating addition to the *Pokémon* canon. Even if you see yourself as more of a videogame fan than the TV series, this limited offering will be sure to ensnare your attention.

You can catch the series on Pokémon TV at **www.watch.pokemon.com.**

GENERATION VI

2013-2016

KALOS REGION

This era marked the second coming of Pokémon Fever, thanks to the absurdly popular Pokémon Go, and was the Generation that showed that the Pocket Monsters could still steal headlines

Honestly, this Generation didn't set the world on fire until 2016 – however, that fire was a blazing inferno. While *Black & White* were praised for putting new Pokémon in the spotlight, *Pokémon X & Y* were something of a step back, putting more of an emphasis on past glories than looking forward. That's not to say this Generation's main games were without anything exciting, of course. *X & Y* brought Mega Evolution to the games, an exciting mechanic that gave old favourites like Charizard brand-new temporary forms, making them viable in the competitive scene. The new roster of Pokémon from the previously unseen Kalos region brought a second innovation too: the Fairy type. This feature marked the first new Pokémon type since *Gold & Silver* and put the dominating Dragon-types in their place. However, the lack of a third '*Pokémon Z*' game and a dramatic reduction in difficulty had the effect of souring the die-hard fanbase somewhat.

Let's talk about 2016, though. Hot damn was this a good year to be a *Pokémon* fan. To kick things off, it was notable for marking the 20th anniversary of *Pokémon*, something The Pokémon Company wanted everyone to know by airing a commercial in the much-coveted half-time ad slot in the Super Bowl. In celebration of this, the original games (*Red, Green, Blue & Yellow*) were re-released on the 3DS Virtual Console, letting nostalgic fans who grew up with the games relive their childhood. A dynamic duo of quality spin-offs launched in the form of *Pokémon Duel* and *Pokkén*. Next, a celebratory era-spanning anime series called *Generations* launched on YouTube for free. Then came *Pokémon Go*, which brought in a halcyon summer of millions of people coming together, making friends and having fun, all in the name of capturing Pokémon. Beautiful!

2013 POKÉMON X & Y

This new era of *Pokémon*, as always, whisked us off to a new land: this time to the Paris-inspired Kalos. *Pokémon X & Y* are remarkable for being the first mainline games to embrace full-3D graphics, the first games to adopt Mega Evolutions, and the first showing of the powerful Fairy type – which were brought in to take Dragon-type 'mon down a peg.

2013 POKÉMON BANK

By the early 2010s, Pokémon storage had become a hot topic. After all, in 2013, there were 721 unique Pokémon to collect across multiple games, so die-hard collectors needed a reliable place to access and store them. Pokémon Bank stepped up as a paid subscription service that let users safely stash their Pokémon away for a rainy day.

2013 POKÉMON THE SERIES: XY

The anime had been soldiering on for nigh-on 15 years, and was approaching 800 episodes by the time the *XY* series debuted. The much-loved cartoon continued Ash's quest as he mirrored the mainline games, this time arriving in Kalos and meeting a Froakie, a Pokémon he'd share a special bond with.

2014 POKÉMON OMEGA RUBY & ALPHA SAPPHIRE

Where *HeartGold* and *SoulSilver* let you journey with your Pokémon by your side, *Omega Ruby & Alpha Sapphire* crammed them back into their Poké Balls. That doesn't mean these games are bad, though – they're quite the opposite. Returning to Hoenn, these games mixed things up by sending you into space… wait, what!?

2015 POKKÉN TOURNAMENT

Smash Bros had been scratching that fighting itch for a while, but there was still scope for a proper Pokémon punch-'em-up. Enter *Pokkén Tournament*, a full-on fighting game only starring Pokémon made by the creators of *Tekken*. Its high-stakes battling smashed onto the fighting scene to rapturous applause.

2015 POKÉMON SUPER MYSTERY DUNGEON

By now, the *Mystery Dungeon* series was a mainstay, and this 3DS edition continues its dungeon-crawling premise. New to *Super Mystery Dungeon* was, of course, Mega Evolutions, as well as Alliance attacks, which enabled your team to come together and deliver a show-stopping strike to the enemy.

2016 POKÉMON 20TH ANNIVERSARY

After two whole decades of Pikachu, Ash, plushies, videogames and so many cards, if there were ever a time for The Pokémon Company to take a victory lap, it would be on its 20th birthday. Celebrations were kicked off in style with all eyes fixed on a special commercial at Super Bowl 50.

2016 POKÉMON GENERATIONS

Like the name might suggest, this celebratory anime miniseries covers stories from all eras of the *Pokémon* canon. The episodes debuted on YouTube, and generally speaking, each offering is fairly short compared to the main anime. However, these are a great trip down memory lane for any *Pokémon* fan.

2016 POKÉMON RED, GREEN, BLUE, YELLOW 3DS

20 years after they debuted in Japan, the original games were re-released on the 3DS's Virtual Console in 2016. These were largely the same editions fans knew and loved, however, you could import the Pokémon you caught through the Generations to the newest games.

2016 POKÉMON GO

Bringing people across the world together using their smartphones to catch and battle creatures in their local park, cafe or back garden, *Pokémon Go* was a phenomenon that captured a worldwide audience. It first launched with the first Generation of 151 Pokémon on its roster, but has since been regularly updated to include the newer monsters.

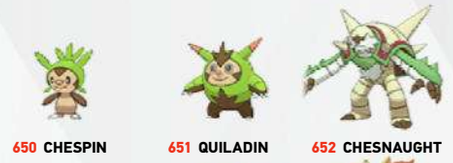
POKÉDEX 650-721

The 72 Pokémon native to the Kalos region that arrived with *Pokémon X & Y* were a trendy and cute bunch, tieing into the games' strong themes of beauty, fashion, balance and harmony. Those strong motifs lent themselves to a new type that debuted this Generation, too: Fairy.

These spritely Pokémon were brought in to help better put Dark and Dragon Pokémon firmly in their place, and they were a hit thanks to strong visual designs seen in the likes of Flabébé, Slurpuff and Aromatisse; even Eevee was roped in to showcase this new type with its ribbon-sporting Sylveon evolution. Some of the older Pokémon were given this new type retroactively, too, such as Gardevoir and Clefairy. It was easy to spot a Fairy Pokémon, thanks to their overly cute and floral designs, however later games would explore the type to include more diverse-looking folklore-style creatures, such as the dark imp Grimmsnarl that can be found in the latest mainline games, *Sword & Shield*.

As well as being the first Generation to feature the Fairy type, this was the first era of *Pokémon* to arrive with full-3D graphics. Powered by Nintendo's more powerful handheld, the 3DS, the Kalos Pokémon felt more alive compared to previous iterations, thanks to the more flexible animation offered by 3D over 2D sprites. This likely informed the design of some of the Pokémon – for instance, it's difficult to imagine the stance-swapping Aegislash switch between wielding its shield and sword in 2D form.

While this Pokédex was a bit slim when it came to the number of new faces compared to previous additions, that didn't stop the new Pokémon from becoming fan favourites. In fact, according to a survey from 2020, the most currently popular Pokémon originated from Kalos: Greninja. This fully evolved version of the Water starter Froakie rocketed in popularity, and for good reason: it's just so darn cool. It's a ninja that uses its tongue as a scarf, what's not to love? Perhaps one of the stronger catalysts for Greninja's success was the anime, Ash and his frog-ninja buddy shared an especially strong bond throughout their time in Kalos, even going so far as establishing a brand-new Mega Evolution-style form called Ash-Greninja. *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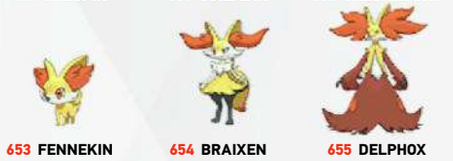
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665 SPEWPA
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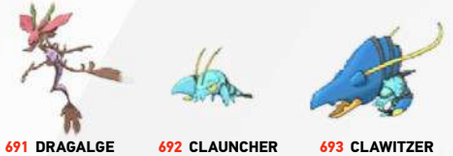

691 DRAGALGE
692 CLAUNCHER
693 CLAWITZER

694 HELIOPTILE
695 HELIOLISK
696 TYRUNT

DID YOU KNOW?

Furfrou lovers can transform the hairstyle of their fluffy pooch at an in-game salon. After five days, though, its natural look will return.

> **"Powered by Nintendo's more powerful handheld, the 3DS, the Kalos Pokémon felt more alive compared to previous iterations"**

697 TYRANTRUM

698 AMAURA

699 AURORUS

700 SYLVEON

701 HAWLUCHA

702 DEDENNE

703 CARBINK

704 GOOMY

705 SLIGGOO

706 GOODRA

707 KLEFKI

708 PHANTUMP

709 TREVENANT

710 PUMPKABOO

711 GOURGEIST

712 BERGMITE

713 AVALUGG

714 NOIBAT

715 NOIVERN

716 XERNEAS

717 YVELTAL

718 ZYGARDE

719 DIANCIE

720 HOOPA

721 VOLCANION

DID YOU KNOW?
To date, Sylveon is the newest Eevee evolution. Its more rounded ears give it a resemblance to a rabbit, meaning it could be based on the mythical Moon Rabbit.

MEGA EVOLUTIONS

How Game Freak supercharged evolutions and kicked off a trend of giving new faces to old favourites

Introduced in the sixth Generation of *Pokémon*, Mega Evolutions were a major mix-up for the series. These temporary transformations allowed a monster to achieve a stylish superpowered state, much like you'd see in over-the-top anime and manga like *Dragon Ball*.

Mega Evolution wasn't available to all Pokémon, however: only a chosen 46 species were given the honour of a new form – or *forms* in the cases of Charizard and Mewtwo. A Trainer needs to tick a couple of boxes in order to achieve it, too: firstly, they need a 'Key Stone', which can be worn on a special bangle. Next, the Pokémon itself needs to be holding a Mega Stone which is typically named after the creature it reacts to – Gyaradosite, Blazikenite etc. The Legendary Dragon Rayquaza is special in this case, it doesn't need a Mega Stone and instead must perform the move 'Dragon Ascent' to evolve into Mega Rayquaza.

Once achieved, Mega Evolution gave the Pokémon increased stats, which made it a crucial tactic in the videogames and added extra spectacle in the anime. You can only choose to Mega Evolve one Pokémon in a single battle, however, which made choosing which monster to supercharge a strategic decision when it came to high-stakes brawls like tournaments.

Sadly, while Mega Evolutions were popular, they didn't hang around for very long. *Pokémon Sun & Moon* ushered in the lacklustre Z-moves seemingly as a replacement of this mechanic, and they're completely absent from the newest games, *Sword & Shield*. That said, the new Dynamax and Gigantamax features feel like worthy successors to Mega Evolutions – with the latter granting certain Pokémon a brand-new super-sized form for three battle turns.

» [3DS] Trainers needed a Key Stone in order to trigger a Mega Evolution in their partner.

» [3DS] Some forms were better than others. Poor Blastoise here just got a different array of water cannons.

POKÉMON X&Y

It doesn't take a Frontier Brain to recognise Pokémon's first full-3D outing as a triumphant modernisation of everything that had come before

Words by Aaron Potter

The launch of new Nintendo hardware always prompts the same question from *Pokémon* fans: how will this extra 'oomph' be utilised to improve the next generation of collectable critters?

This was especially the case shortly after the Nintendo 3DS' launch in 2011, where a definite sense of wheel-spinning could be felt within Game Freak's efforts on *Pokémon Black 2 & White 2* – both games released a year later, but were unfortunately left stranded on the new handheld's predecessor. The first true direct sequels to appear in the series tried to keep things fresh with a follow-up story again set in the Unova region and all-new legendary Pokémon, sure, yet any real attempt to innovate, such as true 3D environments and improved battle animations, were obviously being hampered by the now outdated tech. This changed on 12 October 2013, however, with the arrival of *Pokémon X & Y* – two mainline entries that would launch worldwide simultaneously for the very first time.

The sixth Generation of *Pokémon* felt like a breath of fresh air for the 15-year-strong series on several fronts. One of the most notable came from the major boost in graphical fidelity made possible with the Nintendo 3DS, which allowed the star-shaped Kalos region (this time inspired by locales of France) to be rendered in full 3D. This change lent *Pokémon X & Y* a newfound sense of openness and freedom never seen before, as the towns you visited either by foot or while using the roller skates gifted to you in Santalune City could finally encompass and envelop you. This was the entry that also streamlined and sped up the pace of *Pokémon*'s simplistic opening routine, setting up a story that was expected yet ultimately still exciting thanks to the significant step up in visuals.

Pokémon X & Y's transition to 3D polygons may have meant a move away from the 2D character sprites we had become so accustomed to, but this enabled both titles to offer up a fresh perspective on fan-favourite Pokémon like Charizard, Pikachu and countless others. No longer would players be forced to observe a still image of a Pokémon when entering battles and need to imagine how they might move and react to attacks. Instead, you could actually see a winged Pidgeotto take flight during Sky Battles, or bask in the floundering glory of any Magikarp who attempts Splash. Game Freak took the time to harness the upgraded power of the Nintendo 3DS and animate each creature distinctively, cleverly adding to the established personality and design of all 649 returning Pokémon and the 72 new ones.

Speaking of which, the Kalos region's three starting Pokémon still stand as some of the most

celebrated to ever appear. Fennekin was your Fire option, acting as a cutesy fox complete with bushy tail. The porcupine-inspired Chespin, meanwhile, was a solid choice for players that prefer a Grass type to begin with. Then finally you had Froakie, the Water-type frog, who started off frail before becoming the furious Greninja for its third and final evolutionary stage. Greninja proved to be so popular among fans that it would eventually gain a coveted place in the *Super Smash Bros* roster, debuting in the crossover fighting franchise's 3DS/Wii U outing. This alone was enough to grant *X & Y* a beloved status within the wider *Pokémon* pantheon.

Much as before, *X & Y*'s adventure begins by having your Trainer pick between the three available starters soon after moving to a new town. In this instance it's Vaniville, which is appropriately quaint yet sizeable compared to most that had come before (a nice inkling of the expanded scope that lies ahead). Then, it isn't long before you get your first whiff that things won't quite play out the same as before, as in addition to your rival you're also greeted by three friends in Tierno, Shauna and Trevor, all of who you'll cross paths with repeatedly over the next 30 or so hours to help add extra texture to the journey. From here, you'll uncover a mystery 3,000 years in the making, thwarting the plans of the menacing yet helpless Team Flare and learning the secret behind Mega Evolutions as you work your way through Kalos' Gym Leaders and Elite Four. That last bit should sound familiar.

Pokémon X & Y didn't shake up the formula too much in terms of narrative and how battles played out compared to previous outings, but Mega Evolutions were a nice inclusion that served to introduce a new dynamic to the latter without drastically altering it. Game Freak was smart by not making this an option for all 721 species that are present in the game, rather reserving the ability to transform into super-evolved versions of themselves just for a few select Pokémon. The kicker is that compatible Pokémon in your party have to be holding the correct Mega Stone in order to do this, and could only do so once per battle. This could lead to great moments story-wise, such as when a particularly tough Gym Leader had your back against the wall, only for you to surprise them by deploying your Mega Gyarados that would unlock victory with its Mold Breaker ability.

NEW INNOVATIONS

Making the most of a 3D world

MEGA EVOLUTIONS

■ Evolving had been core to *Pokémon* since the beginning, but in *X & Y* the concept received a significant buff in the form of Mega Evolutions. Here, any Pokémon holding the appropriate Mega Stone could change appearance and boost their stats, giving Trainers an advantage during battles.

WONDER TRADE

■ *Pokémon X & Y* were the most interconnected entries yet at the time, providing plenty more unique ways to engage with players online. One of the most notable was Wonder Trade, which enabled you to upload any captured Pokémon and exchange it for a random one offered by another player.

O-POWERS

■ These were limited-time effects players could share with one another, spanning everything from improved egg hatching to increasing XP. Points were gained from battles, staying connected and seeing someone else use them nearby meant you were able to access them too.

FAIRY TYPE

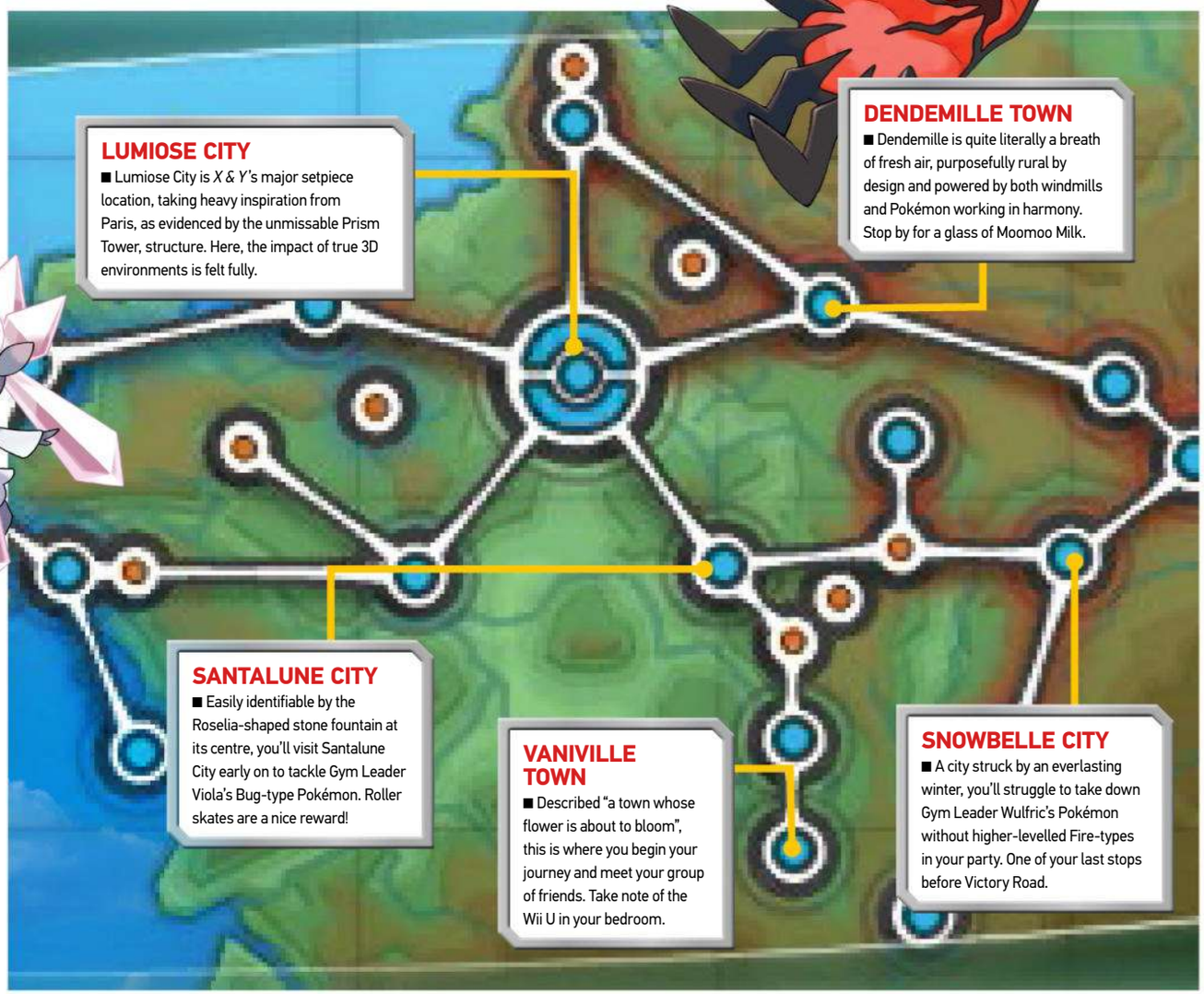
■ Any time a new Pokémon type gets introduced, it's controversial among a small subset of fans. However, in *X & Y*'s defence, Game Freak stated that Fairy's inclusion was necessary to help provide a counterbalance to those that were Dragon type – and it gave Eevee a new evolutionary option in Sylveon.

TRAINER CUSTOMISATION

■ For the very first time in a *Pokémon* game, *X & Y* allowed players to implement a splash of personality onto their Trainer. It was possible to customise your shoes, hat and even backpack, leading Kalos' many shops to all offer different outfit styles.

GREETINGS FROM KALOS

Towns that make up this pièce de résistance


LUMIOSE CITY
■ Lumiose City is *X & Y*'s major setpiece location, taking heavy inspiration from Paris, as evidenced by the unmissable Prism Tower, structure. Here, the impact of true 3D environments is felt fully.
DENDEMILLE TOWN
■ Dendemille is quite literally a breath of fresh air, purposefully rural by design and powered by both windmills and Pokémon working in harmony. Stop by for a glass of Moomoo Milk.
SANTALUNE CITY
■ Easily identifiable by the Roselia-shaped stone fountain at its centre, you'll visit Santalune City early on to tackle Gym Leader Viola's Bug-type Pokémon. Roller skates are a nice reward!
VANIVILLE TOWN
■ Described "a town whose flower is about to bloom", this is where you begin your journey and meet your group of friends. Take note of the Wii U in your bedroom.
SNOWBELLE CITY
■ A city struck by an everlasting winter, you'll struggle to take down Gym Leader Wulfric's Pokémon without higher-levelled Fire-types in your party. One of your last stops before Victory Road.

Mega Evolutions were quite rightly heavily focused upon in the television ad campaigns and marketed as *Pokémon X & Y*'s big new feature. They even served as a new method of distinction between the two available versions, alongside the series tradition of making a handful of Pokémon exclusive to either. Would you purchase *Pokémon X* to add the blue and black Mega Charizard X to your team, or opt for *Pokémon Y* and boost Charizard's inherent Fire/Flying abilities with its Mega Y evolution? Mewtwo was the only other Pokémon to receive two separate Mega variants, and both were another welcome distinguishing factor between *X & Y*.

The effectiveness of Mega Evolutions may have been limited when it comes to how useful they were online, but they succeeded in infusing the series with some welcome visual spectacle that previously wasn't possible. And though some of *X & Y*'s more experimental additions – like the ability to improve your Pokémon's core stats in a mode known as Super Training – wouldn't amount to much later on, the act of super-sizing familiar Pokémon would set a precedent and go on to influence other mainline instalments in the future.

Ever since *Pokémon Crystal* introduced the ability to play your young Trainer as male or female, the community had been crying out for additional ways to customise your character. *Pokémon X & Y* were

entries that leaned into this fully, littering Kalos with plenty of shops that you could visit to change your backpack, hat and overall outfit. Such basic changes might seem trivial compared to leaps made in other JRPGs, but in *Pokémon* it was very much a big deal – especially since all these modifiable traits were now visible in multiplayer battles and the many other online modes. Features like the Player Search System, for instance, which helped you connect with other real-life players were present before, but *X & Y* gave them substantial upgrades, such as the new ability to share an introductory video of you and your current party of Pokémon.

This wasn't, however, a perfect *Pokémon*. For all the bold strides they took in the graphical department and how they succeeded in freshening up the core formula, certain players felt that *X & Y* leaned a bit more on the easier side. In fairness, this was the Generation that had NPCs gift you with more Pokémon over the course of your journey than ever before; gave you the power to Mega Evolve select party members temporarily once per battle; and made the decision to have EXP Share be a Key Item. In previous games it gave 50% of any experience gained to any specific Pokémon that held it, but *X & Y* make it an option you can toggle on or off early on and spreads the experience over your entire party of partners.

Critiques aside, *Pokémon* has always been a series that aims to cater to players both young and old, and with *X & Y* in particular, there was a sense that it intended to be a fresh start and a less daunting jumping on point for any type of fan. This was *Pokémon*'s big coming out party on the Nintendo 3DS, after all, showcasing just how beautiful its world and adorable inhabitants could look when portrayed on the same level as its genre contemporaries. Game Freak may have taken its time getting there, but the end result very much spoke for itself, with *Pokémon X & Y* eventually becoming the second best-selling 3DS games just behind *Mario Kart 7*.

Pokémon X & Y will always be remembered fondly as the games that successfully transitioned the *Pokémon* franchise from a retro-style global phenomenon to modern JRPG powerhouse. Doing this firmly ushered the series into the 21st century, offering new depth to an already colourful experience that players had grown up with for well over a decade and a half. Of course, great graphics alone don't make a game great, and there are plenty of factors that *Pokémon X & Y* could have iterated upon further, but we can forgive making a new Pokémon in the style of a set of house keys for how liberating it felt to explore and 'catch 'em all' within attractive full 3D environments for the first time. The larger emphasis on customisation was also one of *X & Y*'s defining features, granting aspiring Trainers a more personalised *Pokémon* adventure than any that had come before.

» [Nintendo 3DS] Activating a Mega Evolution prompts an appropriately dramatic animation involving both you and your Pokémon.

» [Nintendo 3DS] In addition to your Kalos starter, professor Sycamore will also let you take a Kanto original early on in the game.

» [Nintendo 3DS] Team Flare claim to want to make a "beautiful and better" world, but they actually want to make money being silly yet stylish.

» [Nintendo 3DS] Game Freak wanted to show off *Pokémon*'s new 3D visuals as much as possible. Some locations even offer cinematic camera swoops.

POKÉMON GO

We rewind the clock back to 2016 to relive the incredible story of how Niantic's mobile game captured the world's imagination with the people it affected the most: the players

» The teaser trailers for *Pokémon Go* had everyone guessing what the game would be like. The excitement among the burgeoning community was palpable.

"I've never seen a force so powerful to bring people together as *Pokémon Go* has done." That's no overstatement from the founder of the *Pokémon Go* New York Facebook page. Going by the handle Dankizard, he had borne witness to some of the incredible scenes of *Pokémon Go* players in New York you may have seen online. The footage of hundreds of players flocking into the park as a Vaporeon spawned there was, for many, the moment where the true scale of *Pokémon Go*'s impact became clear. This wasn't some cash-in of a classic brand or a half-measure towards converting classic Nintendo titles to mobile devices. Niantic and The Pokémon Company had hit upon something truly captivating.

While we like to think we have a firm understanding of the appeal of the *Pokémon* games there can be no denying that by 2016 it had faded into the background of the mainstream public consciousness, despite maintaining strong sales across its media empire. Many enjoy the series, but it was beginning to feel as if only the most hardcore of older fans and a regular injection of new younger players cared anymore. *Pokémon Go* awakened that passion again.

Pokémon Go was a project driven by passion from the beginning. Starting as a 2014 April Fool's Day joke conceived by Satoru Iwata and The Pokémon Company's Tsunekazu Ishihara in collaboration with Google, their tease of '*Pokémon Challenge*' ignited a mass of interest. Combining the data of Google maps with an augmented reality *Pokémon* experience was instantly captivating to fans.

As it happened, Ishihara also happened to be a big fan of *Ingress*, Niantic's augmented reality game made when it was a part of Google and saw the potential of that game to form the template of a similar experience for *Pokémon*. Nintendo's plan to expand into smartphone titles was in some ways Iwata's parting masterstroke before he passed away, picked up his successor Tatsumi Kimishima. But then Nintendo's first move into the market, *Miitomo*, didn't fill the world with hope. Thankfully, *Pokémon Go*, using *Ingress* as a starting point, proved to be a much smarter integration of smartphone tech and IP than the social networking app.

It rather begs the question, what was it exactly about *Pokémon Go* that made it special? "I think it's the pursuit that brings people together," said Dankizard. "The pursuit of Pokémon, the pursuit of Gyms, the pursuit to be the very best like no one ever was. Anyone who played *Pokémon* as a kid dreamed of it becoming a reality."

There's something about *Pokémon Go* that appeared to tap into the appeal of the series, perhaps enhanced by the game exclusively using the original 150 Pokémon at first, bringing back many memories for older fans and giving new players a clean slate from which to learn about this world. In many ways, *Pokémon Go* was a pure interpretation of the ideas that began this series in the first place. "*Pokémon* creator Satoshi Tajiri was an avid bug collector as a child, which later led to being his inspiration for *Pokémon*," Lewis Knight, founder of a local Pokémon Go Bournemouth & Poole Facebook group, explains. "This is a natural evolution (pardon the pun) of that initial idea. Coupled with the team-based competition and the social aspects of being able to compare Pokémon or ask advice on where to catch certain Pokémon. I think this is why it has become so popular and has brought so many people together."

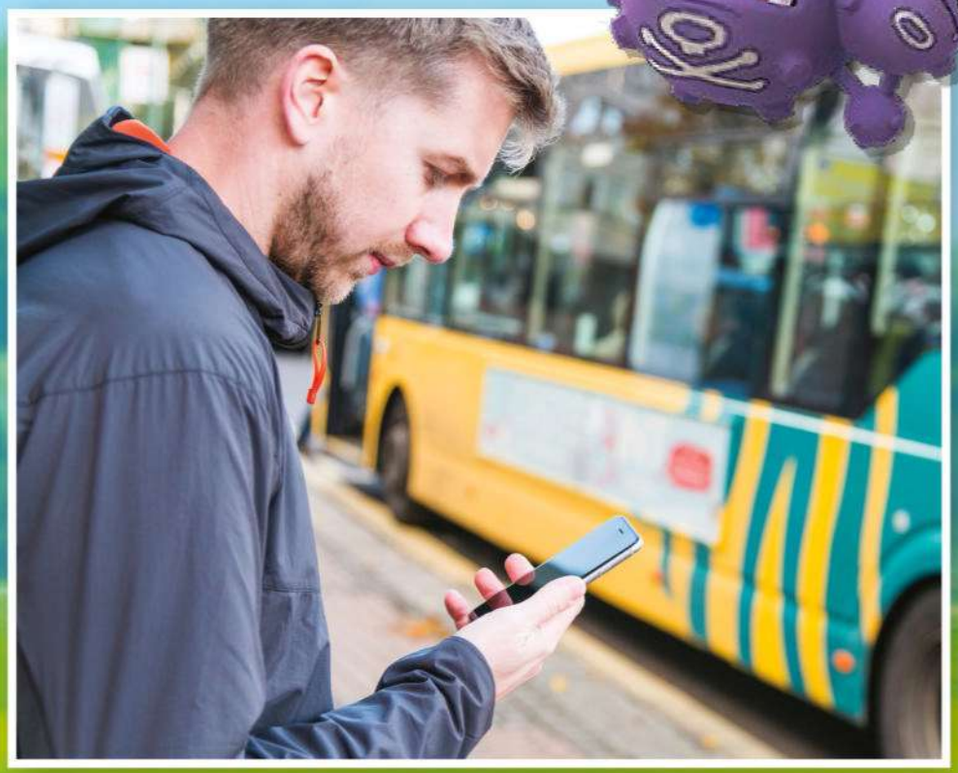
It's an important point that *Pokémon Go*'s widespread appeal wasn't just about the aesthetics of the experience, but the nature of it too. It is a game that demands engagement with the outside world, and it can easily instigate real-world interactions between players in a way that no other videogame has done, perhaps since the original *Pokémon* games.

But before we look more deeply into the social phenomenon of the game, we still need to tackle a larger question about this series. How has it remained so popular after all these years?

"I think part of what has kept *Pokémon* going is the fact that it's constantly evolving," was Joe Merrick's assessment. Merrick is the webmaster and founder of the long-running *Pokémon* fansite *serebii.net*. "There are new elements added with each iteration, new Pokémon, and even with the spin-off games lots of new ideas keep being brought in that make the series fascinating."

For Steve Black Jr, host of the world's most popular *Pokémon* podcast, *It's Super Effective*, the appeal is simple. "Speaking for myself, Pokémon hits home with me because of the collecting. I'm the person that needs all the seasons of a television show, or all the albums from a certain music artist, or all the hidden items in a videogame. [...] On top of that, Pokémon have really strong designs, names, and lore behind them, which just builds on top of the collection aspect."

So who exactly was playing *Pokémon Go* in 2016? Was it just fans of the series from the past 20 years, many of whom are returning or are new players being drawn in by this refreshed and reset experience? Merrick thought a lot of them ▶



were lapsed fans of the game. "From what we can see, the largest part of the fans of *Go* are people who weren't still into *Pokémon*. There's an element of it hitting the curiosity of people who played it in the 1990s when they were younger and hitting that nostalgia element."

"From walking around different cities and overhearing conversations, you have a mixture of *Pokémon* and non-*Pokémon* fans playing," said Black Jr. "I'm sure some care or get excited when they see a certain Pokémon, but others just want to catch them all, and they won't bother to learn the names. Both are acceptable ways to play."

That initial level of engagement suggested that *Pokémon Go* wasn't going anywhere, and it was correct. Helped by its release in the summer season for the Northern Hemisphere, players were flocking to PokéStops and Gyms, hanging out together in parks and as we've found speaking with Dankizard and Lewis Knight, making new friendships through social media groups setting up meet-ups. One of the more spectacular of these was of course that video from Central Park in New York City we mentioned earlier. It's a small snippet of footage that spoke to a wider movement both in that city and beyond.

"I've not only seen the amazing videos, but I've also been right at the heart of them and even recorded some," Dankizard explained. "It's just breathtaking. There's no way to describe it. Any veteran player is sure to feel euphoria at the sight of hundreds of fellow players running in a mob, with the hopes of catching a Charizard."

And this brings up another important aspect of the success of *Pokémon Go*. While there was a mixture of new and old fans playing, the fact that there was already a fanbase ready to embrace the game meant that groundwork was being put in place even before the game came out. Groups such as the New York Pokémon Go Facebook page launched weeks before the game, garnering interest and preparing for the big day.

"My friend and I anticipated the magnitude of this game and saw an opportunity to build, not financially, but socially," Dankizard explained. "Our goal at first was to build up the hype for the game in New York City. When we saw how popular it was, we began working on building camaraderie among the NYC players."

Knight saw what was happening looked to try and replicate it in his area. "I'd seen the social impact the game had had elsewhere in the world. I wanted to try and build a safe and pleasant community for players to arrange meet-ups and social events in the area. Having also been a part of StreetPass communities, I've seen the positive impact they can have on people who may not necessarily get out to meet new people, an issue I've had myself since moving to Bournemouth."

Knight brought up an interesting point; Nintendo had been trying to encourage this kind

WHERE TO FIND POKÉMON

The spawn locations you should be looking out for

WATER

HIGH SPAWN RATES:
Rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, docks, beaches, oceans, canals

LOWER SPAWN RATES:
Wetlands, parks

FIRE

HIGH SPAWN RATES:
Farmland, arid areas

LOWER SPAWN RATES:
Cities, residential areas, beaches, parks

GRASS

HIGH SPAWN RATES:
Gardens, parks, golf courses, woodland

LOWER SPAWN RATES:
Farmland, hiking trails, nature reserves

ELECTRIC

HIGH SPAWN RATES:
Universities, college campuses

LOWER SPAWN RATES:
Cities, commercial areas

ROCK

HIGH SPAWN RATES:
Farmland, quarries, parking lots

LOWER SPAWN RATES:
Hiking trails, nature reserves, parks

PSYCHIC

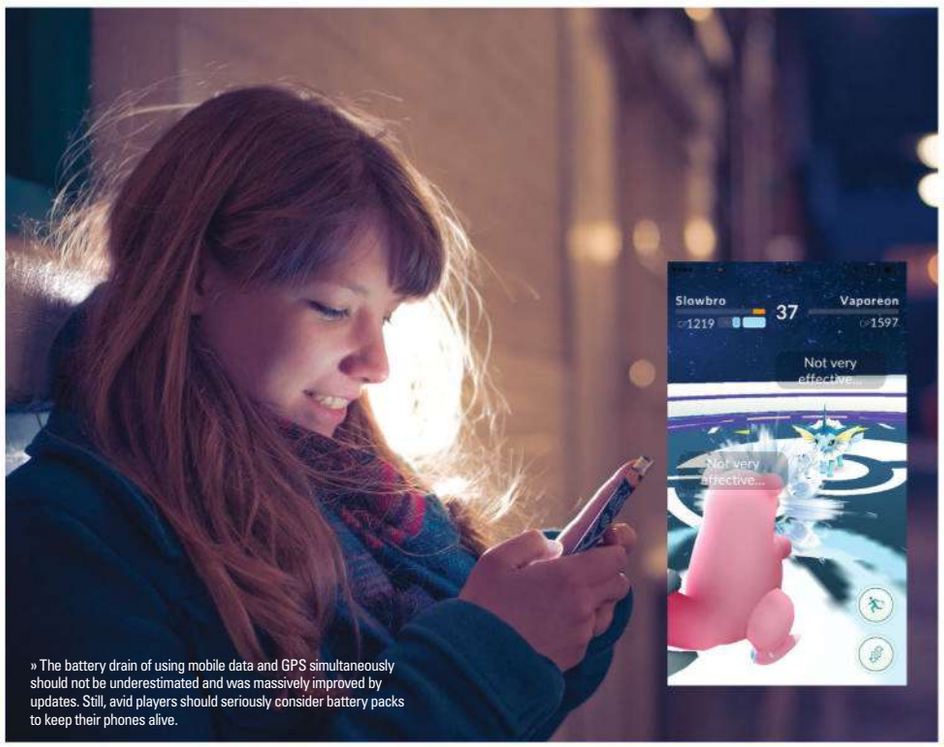
HIGH SPAWN RATES:
Hospitals, cities

LOWER SPAWN RATES:
Residential areas (at night)

BUG

HIGH SPAWN RATES:
Parks, golf courses, gardens, meadows

LOWER SPAWN RATES:
Farmland, woodland, nature reserves



» The battery drain of using mobile data and GPS simultaneously should not be underestimated and was massively improved by updates. Still, avid players should seriously consider battery packs to keep their phones alive.

of real-world interaction between its players, favouring local connections over internet connections, for years. Nintendo 3DS players were well versed in what it means to bump into strangers, finding a common link to each other through this shared interest. As such, the core fanbase was not only ready to embrace and enjoy *Pokémon Go* as a game, it was also ready to embrace it as a socialising tool and as such new players with no awareness of this background have walked straight into a ready-made, friendly and engaged community.

Since its launch, Niantic has continually updated *Pokémon Go* with a wealth of features to help bring it in line with the mainline RPGs. Plus, of course, there was wave after wave of new Pokémon added to the game, too. These new additions have made *Pokémon Go* better than it has ever been, for both solo players and those who frequently meet up in groups. While many initially acknowledged the shortcomings of *Pokémon Go* as a digital experience, the social experience was what was keeping us all engaged. Like the *Pokémon* games of old, it tapped into a need for completion or at the very least some sense of progression and achievement with each monster that is found and caught. Each one added to our Pokédex was another satisfying piece of proof of our endeavour and tenacity. By moving this experience from the streets of Hoenn, Johto and Kanto to New York, London and Tokyo, it helped to ground that emotional response to make it feel tangible. Thanks to dedicated Trainers on the ground and Niantic's commitment to the game in California, *Pokémon Go* has managed to endure through to today. As with any trend, it may wane or be replaced by some other interest down the line, but after almost 30 years of *Pokémon*, we would be wise not to underestimate this series ever again. The need to catch 'em all appears to be stronger than ever.

POKÉMON GO PLUS FAQ

The Plus was a must-have accessory, but what was it exactly?

WHAT WAS A POKÉMON GO PLUS?

It was a small Bluetooth device that linked to your smartphone. You could wear it on your wrist or clip it to your clothing and it would vibrate and light up when in-game events take place, such as a Pokémon appearing nearby.

WHAT ELSE COULD IT DO?

It could actually catch Pokémon for you without getting your phone out of your pocket or bag. When it lit up, you could press its button to automatically attempt to catch the creature. If you're successful it would light up to let you know you've caught it. You could only use standard Poké Balls and catch Pokémon you've caught before with this method.

WAS THE BATTERY DRAIN BAD?

Potentially, but The Pokémon Company said it used a low-energy Bluetooth connection, plus you could keep your game in sleep mode, saving energy from it having to illuminate again.

SO, NINTENDO WAS MAKING THESE?

Yes, while Nintendo is only a part-owner of The Pokémon Company and investor in Niantic, it was the company handling these accessories. They proved to be initially popular, however they soon fell into obscurity.

GROUND	POISON	NORMAL	DRAGON	FAIRY	FIGHTING	GHOST	ICE
HIGH SPAWN RATES:	HIGH SPAWN RATES:	HIGH SPAWN RATES:	HIGH SPAWN RATES:	HIGH SPAWN RATES:	HIGH SPAWN RATES:	HIGH SPAWN RATES:	HIGH SPAWN RATES:
Farmland, woodland, quarries	Wetlands, ponds, lakes	Universities, college campuses	Parks, landmarks	Beaches	Gyms, sporting centres	Churches, residential areas (at night)	Bodies of water, ski resorts, glaciers
LOWER SPAWN RATES:	LOWER SPAWN RATES:	LOWER SPAWN RATES:	LOWER SPAWN RATES:	LOWER SPAWN RATES:	LOWER SPAWN RATES:	LOWER SPAWN RATES:	LOWER SPAWN RATES:
Hiking trails, fields, golf courses, parks	Industrial areas, large buildings	Residential areas, parking Lots	Places of interest	Landmarks, churches, cemeteries	Stadiums, recreation areas	Residential areas	Grassy areas

GENERATION VII

2016-2019

ALOLA REGION

This Generation had us all saying "Alola!" as we travelled to a Hawaii-inspired region. Meanwhile, a new look for the anime debuted, and Pikachu went looking for clues...

Hot off the 20th-anniversary celebrations came *Pokémon Sun & Moon,* and with it the seventh era for the creature-capturing franchise. Still in that celebratory mood, a number of the original-Generation Pokémon returned to the spotlight with brand-new 'Alolan' forms. The likes of Raichu, Marowak, Rattata and more had their designs remixed to fit in with the new sun-soaked setting, which brought new life into the old guard. *Sun & Moon* also brought in its roster of new Pokémon, and were the first (and only) games to feature 'Ultra Beasts', a group of powerful 'Legendary-but-kind-of-not-Legendary' monsters that were available to catch.

Like those Alolan-form Pokémon, the anime underwent a slight aesthetic change. While the look of the TV show had changed slightly over the years, this new series marked a new much more cartoonish animation style quite unlike what had come before. Despite the new look, the show covered more serious themes, and even dealt with concepts like death.

This was an exciting time for *Pokémon* movies too, with the animated films retreading some of Ash's most monumental adventures and the first live-action film: *Detective Pikachu.* The Hollywood movie added star power by casting Deadpool himself, Ryan Reynolds, as the sleuthing gumshoes, and showed off the world of *Pokémon* in a much more realistic style. The movie performed well at the box office, and a sequel was soon announced, slated to debut in 2022.

Pokémon Go continued to enthral gamers, though most of that initial hype wave had died down. This success was noted by Game Freak, which released *Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu & Eevee.* These soft-remakes of *Pokémon Yellow* sought to bridge the gap between *Pokémon Go* and the main games, hoping to give *Go* fans an entry point to the mainline RPG offerings.

2016 POKÉMON SUN & MOON

These were perhaps the most accessible *Pokémon* titles yet, with the games (for better or worse) being packed with tutorials. The new 'Z-Moves' were a zany spectacle, emphasising the bond between Trainer and Pokémon, while the new creatures and Alolan forms were some of the most well-designed monsters yet.

2016 POKÉMON THE SERIES: SUN & MOON

Does Ash look a little different to you? This new series of the anime brought a more cartoonish look to it, but more mature storylines. It followed Ash as he arrived on Alola's shores while he once again sought to be the best Trainer there ever was. It was funnier, too: Ash's first encounter with a Bewear was hilarious.

2017 POKÉMON THE MOVIE: I CHOOSE YOU!

Coinciding with the 20th anniversary of the animated series, this cinematic updated retelling of the very first episode is a touching recreation of Ash's first encounter with Pikachu. Fans online were divided about the reception of one scene where Pikachu actually talks to Ash, as well as the sidelining of Misty and Brock.

2017 POKÉMON ULTRA SUN & ULTRA MOON

While the previous Generation skipped out on an updated version, this returned with *Ultra Sun & Ultra Moon*. Acting as enhanced versions of the previous games, rather than full sequels, *Ultra Sun & Ultra Moon* were much the same, only with a couple of tweaks. They brought back the dastardly Team Rocket, though.

2018 DETECTIVE PIKACHU (GAME)

A story-led 3DS game, this sleuthing special casts you as Tim Goodman as he encounters a strange Pikachu that only he can understand. This game was remarkable in that it was the first *Pokémon* instalment to properly focus on story and voice acting, plus there was that whole movie based on it starring Ryan Reynolds.

2018 POKÉMON QUEST

This free-to-play adventure game debuted on mobile phones, and later arrived on Nintendo Switch. Featuring a cute, blocky art style, it challenges players to clear an island from aggressive wild Pokémon in a series of daring expeditions. It proved quite popular, too, enjoying 7.5 million downloads in its first week appearing on Switch.

2018 POKÉMON: LET'S GO, PIKACHU & EEVEE

Looking to capitalise on the popularity of *Pokémon Go*, these reimaginings of *Pokémon Yellow* bridged the gameplay gap between traditional *Pokémon* and *Pokémon Go*. Here, you capture Pokémon as you would in *Go*, only you battle them in the usual RPG style. It was a fun experiment, but a follow-up is yet to surface.

2018 SUPER SMASH BROS ULTIMATE

Smash got a shot in the arm with this epic entry. Every contender who featured in a previous game in the series returned in this celebratory brawler, including the Pokémon. That means Pikachu, Jigglypuff, Pichu, Mewtwo, Squirtle, Ivysaur, Charizard, Geninja and Incineroar all threw down the gauntlet for a challenge.

2019 DETECTIVE PIKACHU (FILM)

Based on the spin-off 3DS game that arrived in 2018, this big-budget Hollywood movie was a dream come true for *Pokémon* fans. For the first time ever, a live-action *Pokémon* film was shown in cinemas. Featuring Ryan Reynolds and Justice Smith in the lead roles, this fun flick made big numbers at the box office.

2019 POKÉMON: MEWTWO STRIKES BACK – EVOLUTION

Pokémon is no stranger to a remake. However, until this movie, that tradition was limited to the games. This a reimagining of the very first movie, featuring a tweaked storyline and a new 3D-rendered animation style. It debuted on Pokémon Day (27 February) 2019.

POKÉDEX 722-809

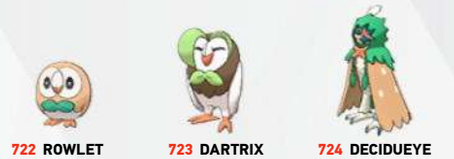
Hot off the 20th anniversary celebrations came this tropical troupe of Alolan Pocket Monsters. Characteristically inspired by the landscape and culture of Hawaii, *Sun & Moon's* collection of 88 new Pokémon were a treat for the eyes and soul. The likes of Comfey encapsulated this feeling perfectly, its floral ring form conjures up images of a lei, while the carnivorous rivalry between Mareanie and Corsola helped the region of Alola feel like a believable ecosystem with its own predators and prey.

There was a crazy load of iconic designs in this group of well-designed creatures. The toy bear-like Bewear had won fans over from its looks alone, however, its featured role in an early *Sun & Moon* anime episode also showed off this Pokémon's harrowing destructive nature – it'd then return over and over again, much to the dismay of Team Rocket. And how could we *not* mention Mimikyu: while each Generation of Pokémon had a cute rodent-like Pikachu copycat (Marill, Plusle and Minun, Emolga etc), this self-aware Ghost/Fairy Pokémon is a knowing wink to the original electro-mouse's popularity. It wears a ramshackle costume that resembles a Pikachu, however, it can't draw very well and ends up looking pretty creepy. Still, Mimikyu's design won over so many *Pokémon* fans that, like Greninja, Lucario and even Pikachu itself, this adorable little imposter has become one of the most loved Pokémon in the fandom.

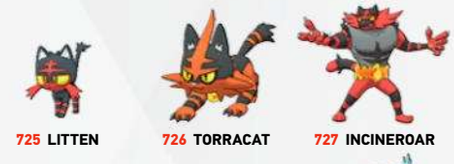
Meanwhile, this Generation saw a unique set of starters that all gained a unique secondary type with their final forms: the cute round Rowlet became part Ghost when it evolved into the arrow-slinging Decidueye, the sneaky Litten adopted the Dark type when it took on the mantle of heel wrestler Incineroar, while Popplio took on a Fairy guise when it blossomed into the mermaid-like Primarina.

Legendary Pokémon were mixed up a bit, too, in the form of 'Ultra Beasts', strange extra-dimensional creatures that appear through Ultra Wormholes throughout the Alola region. Regular Legendary Pokémon, like *Sun & Moon* cover stars Solgaleo and Lunala weren't going anywhere, however, and Ultra Beasts were dropped for the next Generation.

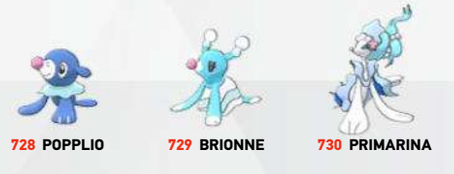
"This Generation paid tribute to a special selection of the original roster of Pokémon, giving them brand-new forms"



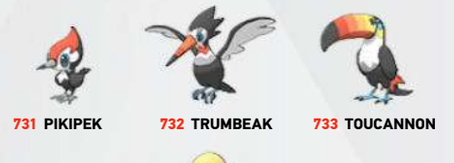
722 ROWLET | 723 DARTRIX | 724 DECIDUEYE



725 LITTEN | 726 TORRACAT | 727 INCINEROAR

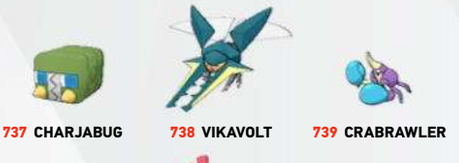


728 POPPLIO | 729 BRIONNE | 730 PRIMARINA



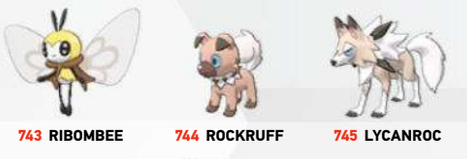
731 PIKIPEK | 732 TRUMBEAK | 733 TOUCANNON

734 YUNGOOS | 735 GUMSHOOS | 736 GRUBBIN

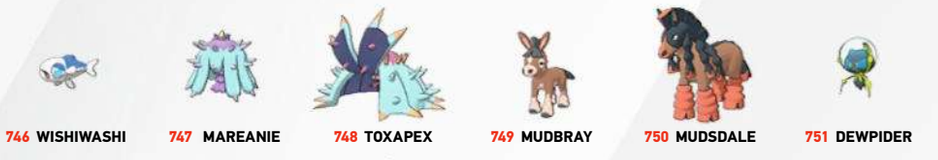


737 CHARJABUG | 738 VIKAVOLT | 739 CRABRAWLER

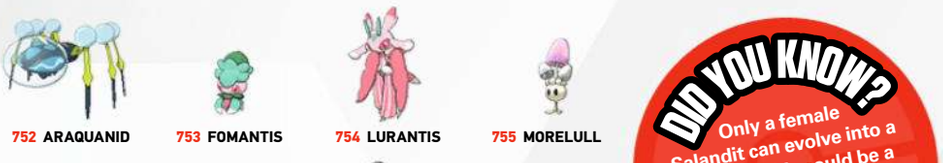
740 CRABOMINABLE | 741 ORICORIO | 742 CUTIEFLY



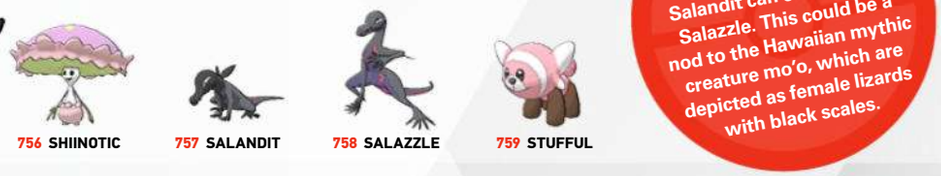
743 RIBOMBEE | 744 ROCKRUFF | 745 LYCANROC



746 WISHIWASHI | 747 MAREANIE | 748 TOXAPEX | 749 MUDBRAY | 750 MUDSDALE | 751 DEWPIDER



752 ARAQUANID | 753 FOMANTIS | 754 LURANTIS | 755 MORELULL



756 SHIINOTIC | 757 SALANDIT | 758 SALAZZLE | 759 STUFFUL

DID YOU KNOW?

Only a female Salandit can evolve into a Salazzle. This could be a nod to the Hawaiian mythic creature mo'o, which are depicted as female lizards with black scales.

760 BEWEAR
761 BOUNSWEET
762 STEENEE
763 TSAREENA
764 COMFEY
765 ORANGURU
766 PASSIMIAN
767 WIMPOD
768 GOLISOPOD
769 SANDYGAST
770 PALOSSAND
771 PYUKUMUKU
772 TYPE NULL
773 SILVALLY
774 MINIOR
775 KOMALA
776 TURTONATOR
777 TOGEDEMARU
778 MIMIKYU
779 BRUXISH
780 DRAMPA
781 DHELMISE
782 JANGMO-O
783 HAKAMO-O
784 KOMMO-O
785 TAPU KOKO
786 TAPU LELE
787 TAPU BULU
788 TAPU FINI
789 COSMOG
790 COSMOEM
791 SOLGALEO
792 LUNALA
793 NIHILEGO
794 BUZZWOLE
795 PHEROMOSA
796 XURKITREE
797 CELESTEELA
798 KARTANA
799 GUZZLORD
800 NECROZMA
801 MAGEARNA
802 MARSHADOW
803 POIPOLE
804 NAGANADEL
805 STAKATAKA
806 BLACEPHALON
807 ZERAORA
808 MELTAN
809 MELMETAL

ALOLA VARIANTS

Giving the Kanto crew a new lease of Alolan life

After 20 years and six Generations of new faces, the original 151 Pokémon were getting lost in the crowd a bit. Sure, there was always a nostalgia factor that would make them appeal to long-standing fans, and designs like Charizard and Pikachu were practically evergreen, but the rest of them were falling by the wayside. For *Sun & Moon*, then, Game Freak decided to give these old 'mon a new lease of life by granting them brand-new forms exclusive to the Alola region. Feeding into the Pokémon world's lore, these regional variants were recognisably the same monsters as their Kanto counterparts, but there was something a little different to their designs thanks to them growing up in the more tropical Hawaii-like environment.

The most obvious of these is, surely, that hilariously gigantic Alolan Exeggutor (pictured on the left, you can't miss it), because of course this coconut-like Pokémon took on palm tree-like traits in Alola. Other notable variants were the hairy Dugtrio (below), a Raichu that surfed on its own tail, a ghostly Marowak (far left) that wielded a fiery bone staff and much more.

Regional forms were a hit, and this tradition has carried on to the new Galar region in *Sword & Shield*, however Pokémon beyond the original 151 have now joined in on the overseas fun.

POKÉMON SUN & MOON

Releasing just in time for a two-decade milestone, the stars of the seventh Generation of Pokémon were a veritable ray of sunshine for the series

Words by Aaron Potter

There's an old tradition in television that producers fall back on whenever a sitcom hits its creative slump. Do they revamp the show's premise, shake up the core cast, or opt to go the dramatic route? Absolutely not. Rather, they simply go on vacation! And while *Pokémon* was far from faltering by the time of its 20th anniversary in 2016 (it had successfully made the transition to 3D with *Pokémon X & Y* before transporting players back to the Hoenn region using the same aesthetic for the *Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire* remakes) Game Freak decided that its player base had earned a much-needed getaway. Separating the series from what had come before by being a welcome mixture of cool-breeze nights and shining solar rays, *Pokémon Sun & Moon* marked at time when the series saw fit to kick back and relax a little.

Even by of *Pokémon* standards, this simple shakeup in setting was enough for the seventh Generation to evoke a much cheerier tone overall, with the Hawaii-inspired Alola region challenging players to conquer four unique islands in the grand pursuit to be the best Pokémon Trainer out there. The developers at Game Freak were so committed to *Sun & Moon*'s unabashedly tropical aesthetic, in fact, that the team made several work trips to the Hawaiian archipelago during the course of development. The sights they witnessed went on to not only inspire Alola itself but also the 81 new species of Pokémon set to debut.

Sun & Moon's holiday atmosphere is immediately felt as soon as you start the game. As a youngster who's recently made the move from Kanto all the way to Alola's Melemele island shortly after having received an invite from your cousin Professor Kukui, we're instantly greeted to a stylish zooming shot of the region we're destined to explore.

» [Nintendo 3DS] Z-moves required Trainers to perform a dance to activate.

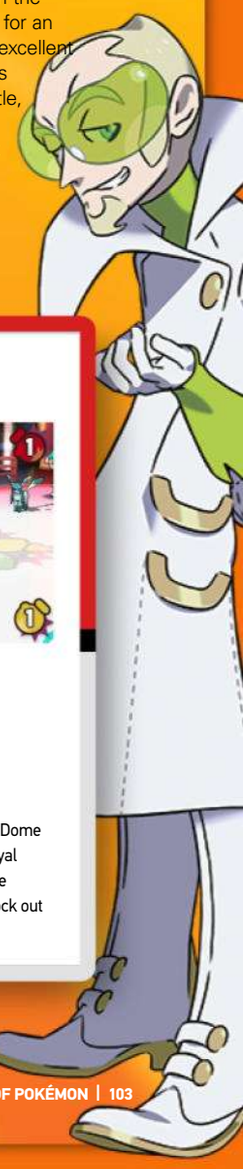
» [Nintendo 3DS] Almost all of Alola's inhabitants boast a relaxed look and vibe.

There's alleged new species of Pokémon in Alola in desperate need of catching, you see, and only the curiosity of an up-and-coming Trainer will do. Before you know it, you're swept up in a story that's familiar but with a few creative spins. Not only are you attempting to become a champion. You're tasked with discovering the secret of the Ultra Beasts and stopping members of the hip-hop-loving Team Skull, too.

The Nintendo 3DS still may not have been a graphical powerhouse compared to, say, its rival the PlayStation Vita, but you can tell that the 3D tech had advanced remarkably since the release of *Pokémon X & Y* two years prior. For one thing, character models no longer appeared squat, or 'chibi', like they used to. Instead, they're now made up of realistic-looking proportions, which is a small change, but makes a huge difference to trainer customisation. Then you have the distinct appearances of Alola's four islands. Whether it's in the maze-like layout of Ula'ula's Haina desert to the intimidating grandeur of Wela Volcano Park found on Akala, the slight step up in visual quality only aids *Sun & Moon*'s improved location variety – all do well to draw you closer into this Poké-fied version of an island paradise.

Yes, the tropical overtones can be found pretty much everywhere in *Sun & Moon*, with the most prominent example being the various Alolan forms of popular first-Generation Pokémon. Think you know what a Dugtrio looks like? Think again. Because, similar to the surfers you might find chilling out on Akala Island's Hano Beach, in Alola all three of its heads now tout long, wavey golden locks. Variants like this offer up a nice twist on beloved Pokémon species that fans were familiar with, cleverly explained in-universe as having developed different visual traits due to the change in territory. That latter explanation also ensures Alolan forms aren't just a superficial change; they will often be made up of different types or dual types and even possess whole new abilities, making them ideal for breeding in the metagame.

Sun & Moon played host to the most species ever featured in a *Pokémon* game at the time, with there being a total of 802 to hunt, capture and train. This included a trio of new starters in Popplio (a water sea lion), Litten (a fiery cat) and Rowlet (a grass-type owl) available to choose from the start of your adventure, all of whom make for an appropriately tough choice thanks to their excellent designs. Other notable Pokémon highlights consist of Palossand the spectral sandcastle, Pikachu imposter Mimikyu, and each of Oricorio's Fire, Electric, Psychic and Ghost forms (as dictated by the coloured nectar you feed it). As with every *Pokémon* instalment not all of *Sun & Moon*'s



NEW INNOVATIONS

Saying aloha to Sun & Moon's new features

ROTOM POKÉDEX

■ Rotom is a Ghost/Electric Pokémon introduced in Gen III that can possess inanimate objects, and in *Sun & Moon* it inhabits your Pokédex, which unlocks a suite of new features exclusive to this entry. In addition to being a real-time map, it will also indicate any areas of interest, take pictures and even speak to you.

Z-MOVES

■ Z-Moves offer you a strategic advantage in battles, acting as ultimate abilities that can only be used once per battle. Trainers need two items to make them work: the Z-Ring and a Z-Crystal. Have a compatible Pokémon hold the necessary Z-Crystal, and enjoy moves like Tectonic Rage and Breakneck Blitz.

POKÉ RIDE

■ Previously the bane of every Pokémon Trainer's adventure, Hidden Machines (HMs) were finally done away with by the time of *Sun & Moon*'s release. Taking their place was the much more visually delightful and fun Poké Ride feature, which lets you instantly summon one of seven different Pokémon useful for travelling.

POKÉ PELAGO

■ The PC Box becomes its own miniscule paradise for any transferred Pokémon in what's known as Poké Pelago. Once here, members of your Poké-party can gradually raise their own level and stats by engaging in fun activities. They will even gather up useful items if you send them out on adventures.

BATTLE ROYAL

■ Battle Royal is a new type of Pokémon battle that sees four different Trainers fight it out against one another simultaneously. It's a mode accessed in the Battle Royal Dome located on Akala Island's Royal Avenue, and the winner is the person who manages to knock out the most Pokémon.

» [Nintendo 3DS] Traditional Gyms might be absent, but Island Challenges still culminate in a battle with a Kahuna.

» [Nintendo 3DS] Pokémon's most famous firebreather can be called upon to fly places.

GREETINGS FROM ALOLA

Holiday tourist attractions well worth a visit

IKI TOWN

■ The third smallest town in Alola, Iki is an early place you visit on your home of Melemele island. It's where you choose between Rowlet, Litten or Popplio as your starter Pokémon.

HAU'OLI CITY

■ From a beautiful beachfront to its bustling shopping district, Hau'oli City is the place to be for Pokémon trainers that want to accessorise. Come here to dress like an Alolan.

PO TOWN

■ Instantly distinguished by its tall walls and barricades, Po Town is occupied by Team Skull when you first find it and plays host to their main base of operations: The Shady House.

SEAFOLK VILLAGE

■ Home to Alola's only floating restaurant and providing easy access to the Exeggutor nature reserve, Seafolk is a quaint village whose townspeople all live on ships. Because land is overrated.

MALIE CITY

■ You'll find your way to the coastal Malie City soon after arriving on Ula'ula Island. Its emphasis on Eastern architecture is what sets it apart from most other locations in Alola.

» [Nintendo 3DS] *Sun & Moon* saw Game Freak push the full-3D capabilities of the Nintendo 3DS even further.

» [Nintendo 3DS] Marshadow is just one of the new Pokémon introduced in the *Sun & Moon*.

"Playing Pokémon Sun & Moon was an apt way to celebrate the franchise's 20th anniversary"

81 additions are winners, but every single one sits neatly into Alola's island vibes.

Your objective to become a champion is this time framed as a coming-of-age Alolan tradition, laying the bedrock for what is easily the biggest change in *Pokémon* since the series first began: the removal of traditional Gym Battles. At first, the decision to cut such a core element feels disorienting and almost wrong, but it quickly becomes clear that the challenge-based Island Trials replacing them make sense for *Pokémon Sun & Moon*'s more laid-back feel. You'll still be levelling up your party of Pokémon so they're prepared for wild and trainer battles. Now, however, you'll be using your brain (as well as brawn) to complete specific tasks set to you by each island's Kahuna.

P*okémon* is a franchise so inexplicably tied to an established structure, the addition of Island Trials felt like a smart way to surprise veteran fans while still remaining approachable enough for new players wanting to make *Sun & Moon* their series introduction. Gym Leaders were a holdover from previous games that to a certain degree promoted conflict, after all, and there is simply no place for such bad vibrations on Alola. If there's one element Trials were lacked it was complexity, as only very few break free from the fetch quest or memory game mould. Even then, this is more than made up for by the small micro-story that each Trial weaves in the lead up to the grand showdown.

Another way *Sun & Moon* ripped up the rulebook was in the welcome absence of HMs. While past entries saw your progress throughout a region constantly halted by blocked routes and pathways that required you to teach a Pokémon a specific move or 'Hidden Machine' like Cut or Surf, here it's replaced by the far simpler Poké Ride system. Now, whenever you need to cross a ravine or dash to places quickly, you merely need to tap on the function from your Rotom Pokédex and select the relevant Pokémon ideal for your travel needs. Riding a Tauros to charge, a Mudsdale to gallop and a Lapras to paddle… using this feature is fun as well as functional. Not since the days of *Yellow* (where Pikachu followed behind you) had your trainer interacted with a Pokémon in the overworld so creatively.

No *Pokémon* entry is complete without its big new feature. *Diamond & Pearl* had online trading, *X & Y* had Mega Evolutions, and taking centre stage in *Sun & Moon* were the somewhat underwhelming Z-Moves. Don't get us wrong, the idea of deploying a screen-shaking super move once per battle to decimate your opponent's Pokémon is sound. In reality, though, seeing the same animation – respective to each move type – play out multiple times soon grows tiresome and really slows down the quick pace of battles. It's a shame, too, because the potential is there for Z-Moves to become another strategical layer, handy for whenever a particular Kahuna has your back up against a wall. Alongside Mega Evolutions, though, the temptation is there to make battles a breeze.

Not every new system and feature was a success or even carry over into future mainline games, but overall, playing *Sun & Moon* was an apt way to celebrate the franchise's 20th anniversary. Rowlet, Litten and Popplio were suitably cute as far as starter Pokémon go; the souped-up Rotom Pokédex offered players better clarity on your team's individual stats and moves; and Alola's Island Challenge was a refreshing change of pace compared to Gym Battles. All these elements working together made *Pokémon Sun & Moon* one of the most delightful Generations in years.

You wouldn't be blamed for thinking that this was it for Pokémon's seventh Generation. Nearly a year later in November 2017, however, Game Freak surprised everyone with the release of *Pokémon Ultra Sun & Ultra Moon* – returning to the idea of an 'enhanced' version that made improvements to the most recent instalment (in the vein of *Crystal*, *Emerald* and so on). It was here where Alola's inherent allure was pushed further using all-new areas, dimensions and characters, improved animations and five additional Pokémon to capture. This brought *Ultra Sun & Moon*'s final total from an already impressive 802 to 807, marking the last time players would enjoy a full National Pokédex in a mainline game. Some difficult decisions as to who to feature would need to be made later.

Both games were unexpected arrivals because Game Freak had steered away from the franchise's traditional third entry for the past two Generations: *Black & White* received direct sequels instead and the supposed *Z* to *Pokémon X & Y* never left the rumour mill. And while these new *Ultra* versions were mostly the same in a lot of aspects, several mechanical and visual tweaks made them a worthwhile pickup for diehard fans, as did an alternate storyline centred on a mysterious group known as the Ultra Recon Squad that took place alongside the *Sun & Moon*'s main adventure. As the swan song for *Pokémon* on Nintendo 3DS, *Ultra Sun & Ultra Moon* were an apt – if ultimately nonessential – end to this era.

POKÉMON DETECTIVE PIKACHU

This live-action adaptation showed off the Pokémon world in a new light

It's quite surprising that it took over two decades for *Pokémon* to receive a big-budget live-action film. The franchise was no stranger to the silver screen, sure, but the anime films didn't have the mass-market appeal from something that had the triple-backing of The Pokémon Company, Legendary Pictures and Warner Bros. Still, *Pokémon Detective Pikachu* was more than worth the wait.

Releasing in 2019, this sleuthy adventure film shows us the world of *Pokémon* in a way that fans had never seen before. It blended real-life actors and environments with computer-generated creatures to excellent effect. The Pokémon all received slight redesigns, too, to help them fit in better with the tangible world around them – Pikachu had noticeable fur, for example, which somehow made it cuter than it already was.

The plot loosely follows the events of the game *Detective Pikachu*, which was released on 3DS in 2016. Based on a theme of fatherhood, it tells the story of Tim (played by Justice Smith), a milquetoast insurance adjuster and lapsed Pokémon fan, as he teams up with a talking amnesiac Pikachu (voiced by Ryan Reynolds) to find out the mystery behind his missing father.

Detective Pikachu was a huge success at the box office, and currently sits at a worldwide gross of $433 million. It's considered the second most successful film based on a videogame franchise, nipping at the heels of 2016's fantasy epic, *Warcraft*. Compared to other videogame film adaptations, the film fared well with critics, too. *Empire*'s Olly Richards described it as "heaps of fun" and praised Ryan Reynolds' performance in his review, but he also criticised the film's plotting in his three-star review. Meanwhile, the film has a 79% audience rating on Rotten Tomatoes, signalling that is absolutely worth a watch.

If you want to watch *Detective Pikachu* for yourself, you can pick it up on Blu-ray, or you can find it available to rent or purchase digitally on most streaming services.

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GENERATION VIII

2019-2022

GALAR REGION

This recently retired Generation was plagued with a Pokédex controversy, but that didn't keep fans away from a pair of excellent main games and innovative flourishes

Welcome to the end of the 2010s, where *Pokémon* has come so far from its humble beginnings, yet it still looks oh-so recognisable. This Generation whisked us off to the shores of Galar, which will look strikingly familiar to those who reside in the United Kingdom. Galar was the setting of the next two mainline games, *Sword & Shield*, the first entries in the core series to feature on a main home games console (if you count the Nintendo Switch as one, as it's sort of a console and sort of a handheld). These new games brought more open areas to explore, a high-resolution graphical style… and a slimmed-down Pokédex.

'Dexit' was controversial. The game-makers at Game Freak made it so that *Pokémon Sword & Shield* couldn't host all 898 Pokémon, as the developers were finding it increasingly hard to balance the game around almost 900 different variable RPG party members. Some fans were quick to criticise the company, and bombarded the team with hate mail, while some accepted the changes begrudgingly and others didn't mind. It was a bitter mess, to say the least. That didn't stop the games selling like crazy though, and *Sword & Shield* has to date shifted over 20.5 million copies. Not bad!

The concluding years of this Generation were bright ones. *Diamond & Pearl* remakes released on Nintendo Switch, and a new edition of Pokémon Snap revived a love for photography. Meanwhile, a new form of adventure arrived with *Legends: Arceus*, and the usual TCG, anime and manga series ticked over as faithfully as they usually do. Today, *Pokémon* is a media monster and the most successful media franchise, beating out even Marvel and *Star Wars*. The secret to success? We'd say it's consistency, quality and a whole Pokédex of devoted fans. Long may its success continue.

2019 POKÉMON SWORD & SHIELD

Dexit aside, *Sword & Shield* were ambitious entries in the series. Introducing the 'Wild Area', an open zone full of roaming Pokémon to catch that made the world feel believable and fun to explore. Also new was 'Dynamaxing' Pokémon, which behaves similarly to Mega Evolutions, but instead turns your Pokémon into a giant.

2019 POKÉMON JOURNEYS: THE SERIES

Unlike previous anime series, the new iteration of the TV show debuted on Netflix. Following in the footsteps of the *Sun & Moon* arc, it keeps that tweaked art style and mixes things up a little further. This time Ash only has one travelling companion, Goh, and they journey across multiple regions including Galar.

2020 POKÉMON TWILIGHT WINGS

Similar to *Generations*, this special limited anime series focuses on an assortment of different stories. Set entirely in the Galar region, it follows a cast of colourful characters and dovetails nicely into the beginning moments of *Sword & Shield*. Again like *Generations*, the episodes are shorter and are available on YouTube.

2020 POKÉMON HOME

This successor to Pokémon Bank is a service that you can use to stash your Pokémon away for later. An app like this is much more important today than ever before, as *Pokémon Sword & Shield* does not let you import all of your previously caught Pokémon, so this is your only option to keep each and every one of your monsters safe in the cloud.

2020 POKÉMON MYSTERY DUNGEON: RESCUE TEAM DX

The remake frenzy has now extended to the *Mystery Dungeon* series. This is a remixed edition of the first two games in the side-series, *Red & Blue Rescue Team*. Lots of quality-of-life improvements makes this edition more palatable for newcomers, compared to the originals.

2020 THE ISLE OF ARMOR & CROWN TUNDRA

The first downloadable add-ons to feature in the main *Pokémon* games, these two packages of DLC have been speculated to replace the 'upper' version concept from previous Generations. Whisking us off to new locations and introducing us to some new Pokémon, this duo of expansions are worth your time.

2021 POKÉMON UNITE

Fixing to enter into the online MOBA genre, The Pokémon Company hired TiMi Studio to create a free-to-play battler for Nintendo Switch and mobile devices. Unite pits teams of player-controlled creatures together to battle for supremacy and knock down their opponent's control points. Its frenetic team-play action proved a hit, with over 30 million downloads.

2021 NEW POKÉMON SNAP

One of the most beloved games in the *Pokémon* franchise has finally got its own follow-up. This new edition of the first-person-photography game takes advantage of the wealth of new Pokémon that have arrived since the original first hit the Nintendo 64. We can't wait to snap a slumbering Snorlax once again.

2021 POKÉMON BRILLIANT DIAMOND & SHINING PEARL

In a departure for *Pokémon* creator Game Freak, these *Diamond & Pearl* remakes will be handled by a new company, ILCA, Inc. The games feature a new style that reflects the original sprite art in the same vein as the recent *Legend Of Zelda* reimagining, *Link's Awakening*.

2022 POKÉMON LEGENDS: ARCEUS

In a surprise reveal in a 2021 *Pokémon* bulletin, The Pokémon Company showed this ambitious open-world RPG. Set in an ancient world of Sinnoh, you play a Pokédex pioneer as you seek to document all the Pokémon species in the vast, wild region. This first real mix-up of the Pokémon formula was a welcome one.

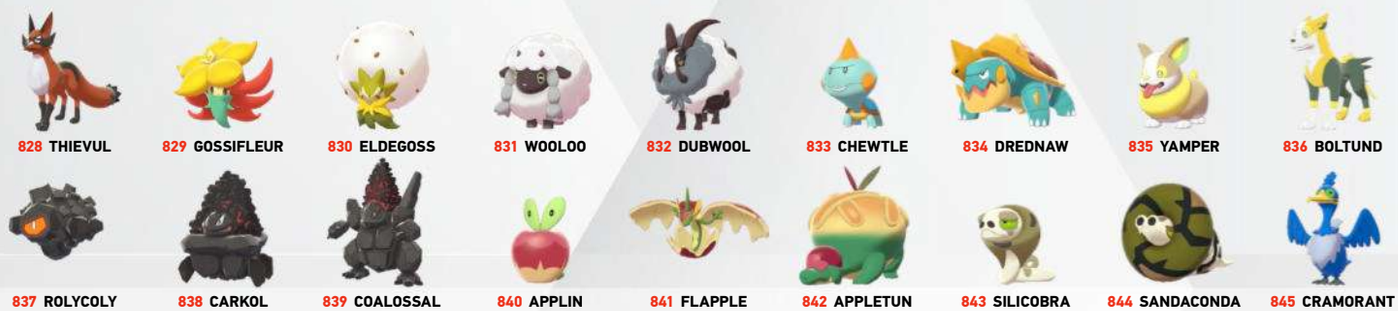
POKÉDEX 810-905

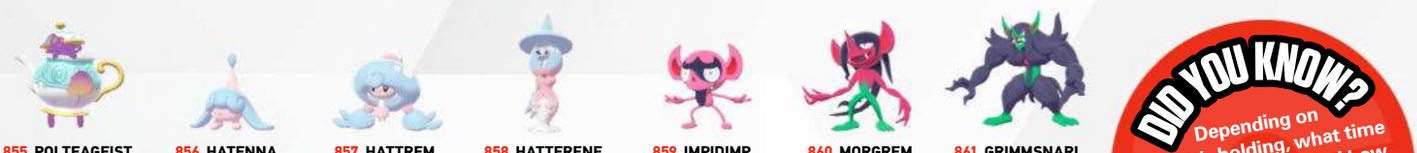
Here, we arrive at the penultimate batch of the current Pokédex. These new monsters landed with *Pokémon Sword & Shield* for Nintendo Switch in 2019 and are a pleasant lot to get acquainted with. Those of you from the United Kingdom might see some familiar sights here, as these Galar region natives have more than a touch of Britishness about them. The Rolycoly evolution line evokes imagery of the coal industry, Sinistea plays on English folks' love for a good old cup of tea, while Yamper is a clear nod to the late Queen Elizabeth II's admiration of Corgis. Obstagoon and Toxtricity tap into the country's association with punk rock too, with both Pokémon looking like they could front in their own potty-mouthed bands.

That's not to say that this British look dominated the eighth Generation's roster. There are plenty of diverse designs showcased here, from the unique offspring-flinging drake, Dragapult, to the imposing-looking bird Corviknight and the dramatic dark fairy Grimmsnarl. The starters – Grookey, Sobble and Scorbunny were instant hits, too, and were the first starters since Gen II to not adopt a secondary type throughout all of their evolution lines. The two star Legendary Pokémon, Zacian and Zamazenta were perhaps the most obvious embodiment of their host games to date, by literally wielding a sword and shield respectively.

Like the Alola region before it, Galar shows off some new designs for a chosen selection of older Pokémon. The likes of Ponyta, Slowpoke and Darumaka, to name a handful, all received exciting new looks, and some of these new forms even had region-exclusive evolutions in the form of Perrserker (Meowth), Sirfetch'd (Farfetch'd), Mr Rime (Mr Mime) and more. Even the original Legendary Birds rocked up with new forms – the new shapes for Articuno, Zapdos and Moltres demonstrated that even the rarest of Pokémon could change based on the region they resided in.

It wasn't all Galar this Generation, too. Our foray into the old-timey Hisui region let us see some new regional Pokémon iterations as well as some ancient evolved forms. Little did we know, however, the likes of Basculegion, Ursaluna and Kleavor were something of a clue into what we could expect from the next Generation of time-bending Pokémon. ✱

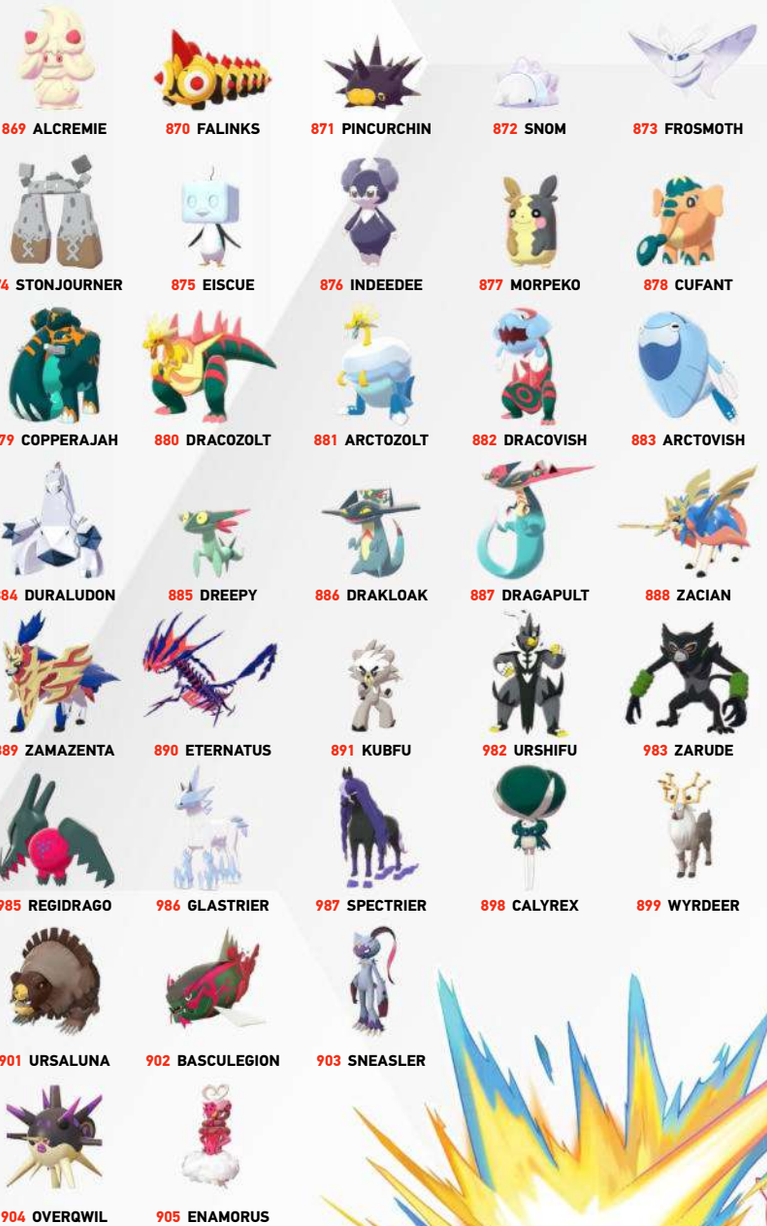




DID YOU KNOW?

Depending on what it's holding, what time of day or night it is and how long the Trainer spins on the spot, Milcery can evolve into a bunch of unique-looking forms.

> “Like the Alola region before it, Galar shows off some new designs for a chosen selection of older Pokémon”



GIGANTIMAX FORMS

Battles in Galar were a big deal, and we weren't joking when we said 'BIG'

Recent *Pokémon* Generations have all had something unique that made them stand out. Generation VI had Mega Evolutions, Generation VII had its Z-Moves, and this new era of *Pokémon* has Dynamax and its bigger sibling Gigantamax. Both of these systems follow a similar core rule: they make your Pokémon turn into a huge version of itself, however while Dynamaxing just gave you a big version of your trusted pal, Gigantamaxing gave them a brand-new supercharged form, similar to Mega Evolutions.

Wild Gigantamax Pokémon are found in Max Raid battles, commonly encountered in dens in Galar's Wild Area. Multiple Trainers can team up to take down these titans, and once their HP hits zero, you have a change to throw a beach ball-sized Poké Ball at them in the hopes of adding it to your collection.

This new feature added new larger-than-life spectacle to battles, particularly with the Gym and Elite Four showdowns, and is generally one of the aspects from *Pokémon Sword & Shield* that most fans agreed was a great addition to the series.

POKÉMON SWORD & SHIELD

Pokémon gets wild for its Nintendo Switch debut, streamlining some of the series' most formulaic elements while lacking true evolution

Words by Aaron Potter

After both *The Legend Of Zelda* and *Super Mario* underwent vast reinventions for their first outings on Switch, owners of Nintendo's exciting new hybrid console had high hopes for what the next era of *Pokémon* might bring. This would mark the first time that a mainline game would be rendered using full high-definition graphics, that much was known, but after the tease that was the more pared-back *Pokémon Let's Go, Pikachu! & Eevee!* – whisking us off to the original Kanto region for the third time – all eyes were on developer Game Freak to hit a home run with *Pokémon*'s eagerly anticipated eighth Generation.

By the time *Pokémon Sword & Shield* released worldwide on 15 November 2019, it quickly became clear that the experience players were given wouldn't be the major overhaul most were hoping for. The first 'true' *Pokémon* on Nintendo Switch rather turned out to be a classically old-school JRPG adventure, one unabashedly indicative of the established series formula with the odd new feature sprinkled in. These, combined with the return of several series staples like Gym Battles and using a bike for travel, made *Sword & Shield* a crowd-pleasing entry for all types of fan.

After playing through the usual opening rigmarole of being a budding young Trainer who's recently

moved to a small town, you're soon released into the new Galar region. This time the sights and sounds around you take heavy cues from Great Britain's iconic landmarks, and it helps give *Sword & Shield* elements of confidence and regal-ness not found in most *Pokémon* adventures. You feel this in everything from the region-wide train system to the myriad rivers and the occasional rainy atmosphere. As an example, Wyndon serves as *Sword & Shield*'s main hub this time around, and it's hard not to think of the city's Rose Of The Rondelands hotel as being a dead ringer for the Houses Of Parliament.

All of Galar's towns and cities do a great job at showcasing a different aspect of British culture. Motostoke is identifiable as the region's industrial heart, for instance, being surrounded by intentionally tough-looking brick walls, featuring puffs of steam spewing out of the ground and a large gear lift that carries you from one level of the city to the other. Then you have the idyllic town of Stow-On-Side, which is situated on the side of a mountain and home to a small outside market. All these locations and more represent some of the most distinct ever featured in a *Pokémon* game.

On the visual front, *Pokémon Sword & Shield* continued Game Freak's tendency to prioritise its colourful art style and charm over power-pushing graphics. The games never look bad per se, but at the time it was hard not to compare this to other trademark Nintendo franchises getting the HD treatment on Nintendo Switch and not be disappointed by Galar's many wide-open spaces that are simply devoid of life. *Sword & Shield* launched a whopping two years after the console's release, after all, yet like it or lump it, you sense that Game Freak was still thinking about *Pokémon* in terms of it being a handheld game first and foremost.

> **"The Wild Area is a sprawling chunk of landscape that's split up into different sections"**

Luckily, any aesthetic drawbacks are more than made up for by *Sword & Shield*'s much broader scope and the added attempt to let you break free of the rigid route structure via a new open-world(ish) section known as the Wild Area. It's here where you're given full control of the camera for the first time in a mainline *Pokémon* game and are free to roam the grassy fields in search of new species to better diversify your party. It's a sprawling, uninterrupted chunk of landscape that's split up into different sections, with most containing several unique Pokémon to catch and different weather types to accommodate.

It's surprising just how early on in *Sword & Shield*'s story you're thrust into the Wild Area, as while those with a penchant for filling out their Pokédex will appreciate this no-nonsense approach, it's likely you'll bump into overpowered Pokémon types you just can't compete with yet. Even so, being let loose to wander at your pleasure within the Wild Area made for a refreshing change of pace and helped shake up the franchise's otherwise strict story template. The presentation for these segments can come off as bland, though, evidenced by abrupt weather transitions that appear out of nowhere and extreme pop-in and framerate slowdown whenever you take the catching action online.

Despite the Wild Area's drawbacks, you can tell that Game Freak's heart was very much in the right place. It demonstrated how unafraid the long-time developer was to try something different when making the jump to a new console generation. And while *Pokémon Sword & Shield*'s online functionality didn't make for the most reliable experience, any frustration suddenly fell away by the time you and other real-life Trainers had uncovered a den and tried to take down a continually Dynamaxed Pokémon as part of the all-new Max Raid Battles.

Dynamaxing made its debut in *Pokémon Sword & Shield*, replacing the concept of Mega Evolutions (first introduced in *X & Y*) by making the act of growing taller and becoming more powerful available to every Pokémon – it would no longer be reserved for just a select few. The major difference between these two concepts, however, is that with Dyanamaxing your chosen party member can no longer enjoy the boosted HP and PP benefits

NEW INNOVATIONS

Fresh features for the first HD-ification of Pokémon

WILD AREA

■ The Wild Area marked a major departure from other *Pokémon* locations by giving you a vast stretch of land to explore. Here you'll find all types of Pokémon to catch, some of which are too high-levelled at first but are ideal for fleshing out and improving your team later on.

DYNAMAX AND GIGANTAMAX

■ *Sword & Shield* made it possible for you to temporarily increase the size and stats of every Pokémon. While every one can Dynamax, however, a handful of species can Gigantamax and gain access to exclusive G-Moves to help turn the tide of Trainer battles.

GYM CHALLENGES

■ Gym Leaders and Badge collecting make a welcome return in *Pokémon*'s full Nintendo Switch debut, but an element of *Sun & Moon*'s Island Trials cross over in the form of Gym Challenges. These precede every Gym Leader battle and often revolve around a unique minigame or puzzle.

MAX RAID BATTLES

■ *Pokémon* had been searching for ways to let Trainers play co-operatively for a while. Well, in *Sword & Shield* the series cracked it by implementing what's known as Max Raid Battles. These you will find in the Wild Area, allowing teams of four to challenge a Dynamaxed Pokémon.

EXPANSION PACKS

■ Despite being the case for most mainline instalments, *Sword & Shield* didn't receive an expanded standalone third entry. Instead, Game Freak continued the games' story, introduced new locales and expanded the Pokédex via two separate DLC expansions: *The Isle Of Armor* and *The Crown Tundra*.

» Poor Corsola… its Galarian form reflects how the coral reefs in the real world are suffering.

» [Switch] Even in wild Pokémon battles, *Sword & Shield* are able to make use of each town's unique environments.

▶ indefinitely after the effect is activated. Instead, the form will only last for three turns, offering up an extra layer of strategy by making you consider the appropriate time to Dynamax. Do you do it right away in the effort to overwhelm your opponent early or wait for them to pop and rival their Pokémon's temporary strength? The choice is yours.

As if watching your Pokémon scale up to the size of a stadium wasn't already enough, *Sword & Shield* introduced an additional spin called Gigantamaxing. These do, in fact, line up more with what players had come to expect from Mega Evolutions: drastically altering the look of familiar species as they temporarily benefit from the use of G-Moves and enhanced power output. Pokémon capable of Gigantamaxing include Gen I mainstays such as Snorlax, Eevee and Pikachu, as well as newcomers like Orbeetle, Duraludon and Grimmsnarl. Fresh concepts like these, alongside Max Raid Battles and the Wild Area, are all indicative of Game Freak's intention to really showcase the HD-ness of this eighth era of *Pokémon*.

The foundation in *Sword & Shield* might be recognisable for players with a two-decade-long history with the series, yet there's a clear willingness from Game Freak to iterate – at least in incremental ways. Random battles, for example, are not so random anymore. Taking a cue from *Pokémon Let's Go*'s rule book, wild Pokémon instead appear in the overworld, giving you the option to avoid any persistent Zigzagoons or Nickits with ease. Then there are the small challenges that sit in front of traditional Gym Leader battles in which you often have to solve a puzzle or complete a basic task before having the opportunity to win a Badge. Almost every formulaic element has been streamlined in *Sword & Shield*, meaning a far speedier tutorial section and a de-emphasis on certain items.

One of the more controversial aspects of *Pokémon Sword & Shield* was the absence of a full national Pokédex. It was – and still is – a major point of contention among many die-hard *Pokémon* fans: that for the very first time within a mainline instalment you would no longer be able to capture every species ever introduced thus far. Galar would see the introduction of 81 never-before-seen collectable critters, sure, but whereas the game's successor played host to a truly staggering 801 in total, only 400 would eventually make the transition over to *Sword & Shield* – indicating that many fan favourites had been cut. Even the inherent cuteness of new starters Scorbunny (Fire), Grookey (Grass) and Sobble (Water) made this a tough pill to swallow for some.

» [Switch] Two Gym Leaders are exclusive to either game. *Sword* players face Bea while *Shield* players battle Ghost specialist Allister.

'Dexit', as it was commonly referred to, became less of an issue once *Sword & Shield*'s expansions rolled out throughout 2020. Though still far off from breaking the 800 mark, *The Isle Of Armor* and *The Crown Tundra* increased the overall count and made for another franchise first, as *Pokémon* scrapped the traditional enhanced entry in favour of a more modern concept that had previously stayed alien to Game Freak: DLC. More than 200 pre-existing species were added on top of the base game between both expansion packs and continuing the story of *Sword & Shield* by jetting your Trainer off to new areas based on Scotland and the Isle Of Man. It may have taken its time getting there, but Generation VIII had finally become the full package.

For all its slight additions and minor adjustments, *Pokémon Sword & Shield* will always go down in history as the entry that satisfied but still left people wanting more. Because, for all the ways it reinforced just how well the classic formula could work within a modern gaming landscape, it ultimately failed to reach the high bar set by other classic Nintendo franchises that had made the transition to Switch. This is a franchise built around the idea of evolving, after all, yet the reduced Pokédex, lacking visuals and underdeveloped Wild Area sections signified a game doing the exact opposite. Where *Sword & Shield* did succeed, however, is in teaching Game Freak a lesson – one we hope the studio will be carrying into future Generations of *Pokémon*.

» [Switch] You're introduced to Galar's leading Pokémon champion, Leon, early on in the story. You know he means business because he has a Charizard.

GREETINGS FROM GALAR

A whistle-stop tour of Pokémon's UK-inspired region

» [Switch] The added power of Nintendo Switch gave Game Freak full rein over different weather elements.

WYNDON

■ Wyndon serves as Galar's central hub and takes direct inspiration from the UK's capital. It is the second-most-populous city to ever appear in *Pokémon*, just behind Lumiose City in Kalos.

BALLONLEA

■ Ballonlea is easily identifiable thanks to its towering trees and luminous glowing mushrooms. Houses and a Gym Leader stadium are present, but most people make their home among the tree trunks.

MOTOSTOKE

■ Showcasing the modern marvel of Galarian engineering, Motostoke is entirely powered by steam and indicative of the region's industrial revolution. Marvel at its gear lift and sky-high brick walls.

HULBURY

■ Home to several market stalls as well as the famous Captain's Table seafood restaurant, Hulbury is a port town and where you visit to claim the Water Badge.

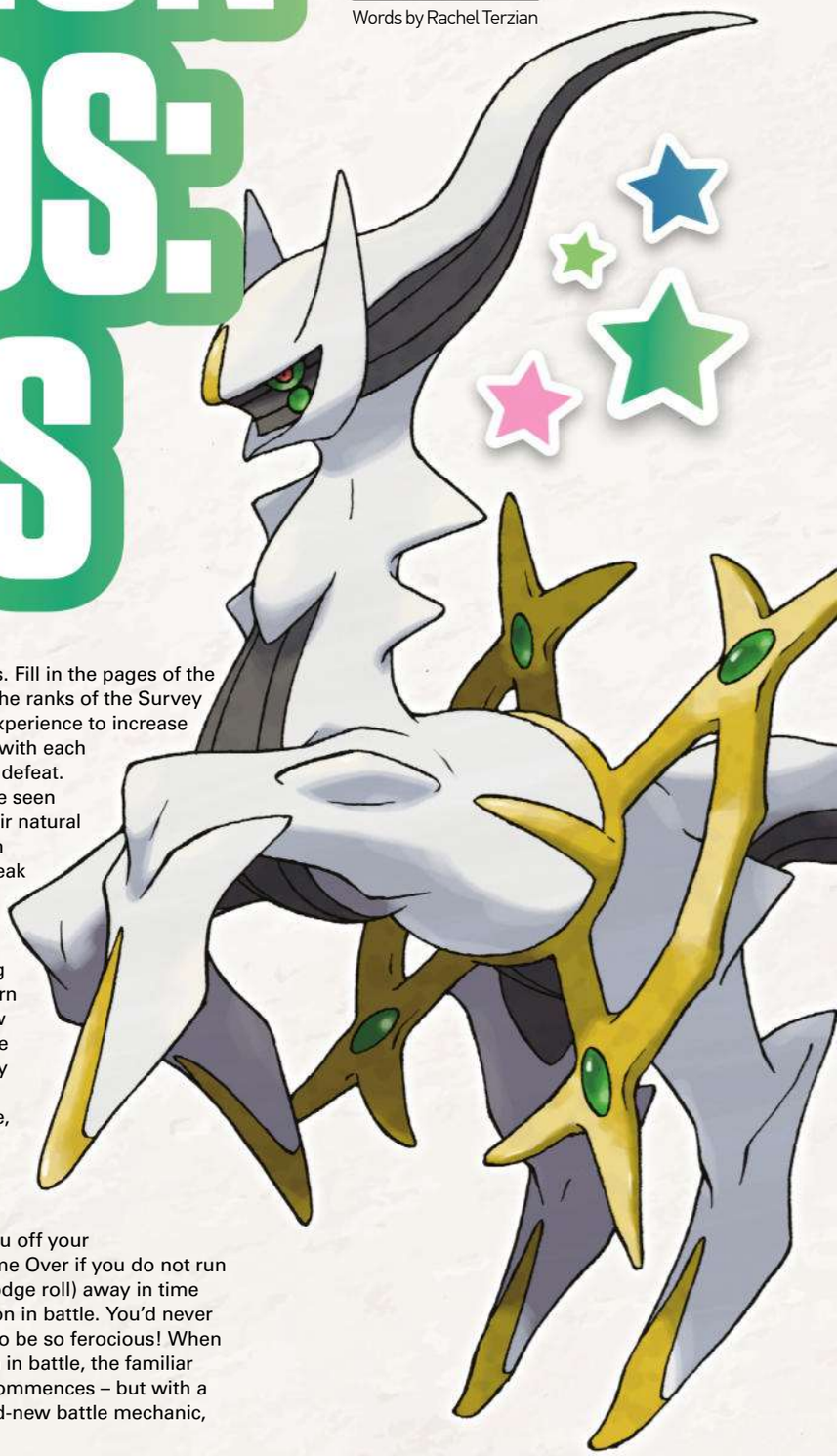
POSTWICK

■ Postwick is as quaint as they come when it comes to starting locations in *Pokémon*. Its population may only seemingly be five people, but this farming town is picturesque and where you meet best friend Hop.

POKÉMON LEGENDS: ARCEUS

Traverse the vast lands of ancient Sinnoh in this action-packed role-playing game that takes the franchise in a bold, exciting new direction

Words by Rachel Terzian



Have you ever wondered what the fascinating world of Pokémon might have looked like in the distant past? Many years before people happily sent their plucky ten-year-old children out into the wilderness to become Trainers, wild Pokémon were largely feared and avoided by all but a brave few. *Pokémon Legends: Arceus* takes us back in time to the land of Hisui, an ancient version of Sinnoh – many years before the region was filled with the likes of Gyms, Contest Halls, TV stations and Global Terminals.

Team up with Professor Laventon, a keen researcher with a fondness for potato mochi, who is developing the region's first-ever Pokédex (a written journal rather than an electronic device, of course) and soon enlists your help in doing so. As a member of the Galaxy Team's Survey Corps, a group of folks courageous enough to venture into the far reaches of the region, you're tasked with catching and recording data on Hisui's Pokémon, as well as solving the many mysteries of the land – including a very troubling spatial distortion that can be seen above the looming heights of Mt Coronet...

Armed with the newly invented Poké Balls that you can craft yourself out of items found on your adventure, you set out on your journey across Hisui's vast open plains, swampy marshlands, snow-capped mountains and treacherous volcanos. Fill in the pages of the Pokédex and rise in the ranks of the Survey Corps, as you gain experience to increase your Research Level with each critter you catch and defeat. Wild Pokémon can be seen roaming about in their natural habitats, and you can crouch down and sneak up on them before throwing a skilfully aimed Poké Ball with the hopes of catching it. You're quick to learn why only a select few have dared to venture out beyond the safety of their homes in the quaint Jubilife Village, however. Some far less amicable Pokémon will strike you with powerful attacks that knock you off your feet, triggering a Game Over if you do not run (or perform a deft dodge roll) away in time or defeat the Pokémon in battle. You'd never expect a little Paras to be so ferocious! When engaging a Pokémon in battle, the familiar turn-based system commences – but with a few twists. In a brand-new battle mechanic,

RPG EVOLUTION

Legends: Arceus breathes new life into the franchise with some fun changes

TAKE TO THE SKIES

■ The vast region of Hisui is yours to discover and explore! Unlock even greater freedom by befriending the likes of Basculegion, Sneasler and Hisuian Braviary, who are willing to ferry you across the seas, traverse treacherous mountains and fly you across the land. There'll be nothing to stop you from discovering all that this new region has to offer!

TASKS GALORE

■ *Legends: Arceus* is brimming with side quests, providing you with hours of gameplay alongside the main story. Whether you're rounding up a group of pesky Bidoof or gathering 107 ghostly apparitions, there's so much to keep you busy. There's even a task that'll see you reading clues in search of all 28 of the mysterious, alphabet-shaped Unown.

HISUIAN FORMS

■ Get ready to encounter some brand-new regional variants on your adventure, from the adorable Fire/Rock-type Hisuian Growlithe to the elegant-yet-deadly Grass/Fighting Lilligant. Plus, once you've fully evolved your starter Pokémon, you'll be the proud master of a Hisuian Decidueye, Typhlosion or Samurott, all with new secondary types and powerful moves.

ALPHA POKÉMON

■ The region is home to some powerful beasts in the form of Alpha Pokémon, identifiable by their glaring red eyes and sudden change in background music as you approach. Early on in the game, these Pokémon are best avoided until you have levelled up your team. When you're prepared, these battles are a great way to earn experience and pick up rare items.

MASS OUTBREAKS

■ Once you've reached a certain point in the story, you can spot Mass Outbreaks on the map, an area in which multiple of the same species of Pokémon are gathered. Shiny Pokémon also have an increased chance of appearing in an outbreak. Massive Mass Outbreaks, available with the Daybreak update, can even feature terrifying hordes of Alpha Pokémon.

you can switch between two styles of attack – Strong and Agile – to take down your foes. Strong style boosts the power and accuracy of your Pokémon's moves, but reduces your action speed, meaning your opponent might be able to land more attacks against you. Agile style, meanwhile, raises your action speed instead, giving you the chance for consecutive attacks, but reduces your move's power. As you advance in your quest and begin to face tougher opponents, including ruthless Alpha Pokémon, mastering these strategies could be the difference between winning or losing.

As well as encountering over 200 wild Pokémon to add to your team of powerful allies, you'll also make friends with some remarkably familiar faces on your adventures in Hisui. Whether it's the Galaxy Team's stoic leaders Kamado and Cyllene – bearing a strong resemblance to the Gen IV games' Professor Rowan and Galactic Boss Cyrus, respectively – or some of the friendly townsfolk who run the facilities in Jubilife Village, it's a joy to meet with the ancestors of beloved Pokémon characters from across the franchise.

As you explore Hisui, you soon encounter stories of the 'Almighty Sinnoh', the name that members of the rivalling Diamond and Pearl Clans give to the region's revered deity. The two factions don't agree on the other's interpretation of this enigmatic being, with the Diamond Clan lauding it as a lord of time and the Pearl Clan giving praise for its authority over space. But what is the true answer behind this Almighty Sinnoh, and does it link to your sudden appearance in this ancient world?

Before long, you're assisting the two clans in quelling the fury of the region's Noble Pokémon, who have become frenzied with an unknown cause. This is where you experience the game's 'boss fights', requiring the use of many forward rolls to dodge attacks and testing your ability to throw items at speed, before taking them on in the usual format of turn-based battle. In yet another mystery to solve, why are these Noble Pokémon in such a frenzy, when they are usually revered as loyal protectors of the land?

It's certainly an exciting time to be a *Pokémon* fan. With *Legends: Arceus*, it's clear Game Freak is willing to take its series in a fresh direction, and we're excited to see what the future has in store for upcoming adventures. But in the meantime, you have a huge region to explore, plenty of research to complete, new Pokémon to discover, and a deity or two to meet...

» [Switch] Encounter new characters on your adventure, and have fun inferring who their descendants might be.

» [Switch] Hisui has adorable regional variants of old favourites. Here, Voltorb is Electric/Grass type.

» [Switch] Cyllene heads up the Galaxy Team's Survey Corps and reviews your progress throughout your adventure.

GENERATION IX

2022 TO PRESENT

PALDEA REGION

Welcome to today, where we are at the very forefront of a new era of Pokémon. As of yet, the future for the series has a certain mystery about it, but we're sure it's going to be bright

Do you feel those Butterfrees in your stomach? They're signalling that there's something on the horizon, something exciting and new. What could it be? It's a brand-new Generation of course! The dawn of a new era of *Pokémon* is always exciting, especially at this early stage. It's a time of anticipation as we celebrate the arrival of two brand-new games, along with all the new faces and features they have brought with them.

Pokémon Scarlett & Violet are this Generation's flagship titles, whisking us off to the Iberian Peninsula-inspired Paldea region. It is a verdant land, full of new species of Pokémon to discover, along with regional variants of familiar friends – Wooper and its Paldea-exclusive evolution Clodsire are two standout favourites. As for the brand-new Pokédex, it's already shaping up to match the quality we expect from the mad Pokémon inventors at Game Freak. The starter trio of Sprigatito, Fuecoco and Quaxly have already got us reaching for our Poké Balls. Meanwhile, the hog-like Lechonk, adorable Fidough and formidable Ceruledge are set to be instant favourites with Pokéfans.

New games are good, but what else is going on in the mega media world of *Pokémon*? The truth is, we don't fully know; however, we can offer some insight into what to expect. A new anime will arrive soon once we say farewell to Ash as he ventures into retirement after finally becoming a Pokémon Master.

The TCG will evolve to encompass the new Pokémon introduced in *Scarlet & Violet*. *Black & White* remakes are likely to be in the works, too, which means we get to experience the epic Unova adventure once again. Outside of those expected instalments, however, the years ahead are unclear.

One thing is for sure, though: it's never a bad time to be a *Pokémon* fan, and this Generation is sure to inspire adventure, excitement and surprise.

POKÉMON SCARLET & VIOLET

The ninth era of *Pokémon* kicked off with this confident pair of Paldean games. Taking lessons from *Sword & Shield* and *Legends: Arceus*, Game Freak delivered a double team of mainline titles that mixed things up in many successful ways. Most remarkable was the open world, enabling Trainers to seamlessly explore the world, which made for a much more expansive adventure. While the games drew criticism from critics for their poor technical performance and bugs, *Scarlet & Violet* demonstrate that the *Pokémon* series can still evolve in exciting ways.

TCG

Taking inspiration from the mainline videogames, the star mechanic of the current TCG is the Tera Pokémon that feature unique artwork to reflect their Tera Types. As with any new Generation, the new Pocket Monsters on the block are the shining celebrities of the new set. Additionally, a 'classic' version of the trading card game was revealed to be in the works.

ANIME

The last series saw Ash finally become a Pokémon Master in the World Coronation Series. Then, it was revealed that Ash and Pikachu will hang up their caps after over 25 years of adventures. The duo said their goodbyes in a special 12-episode arc called 'To Be A Pokémon Master' before handing the torch to two new protagonists, Liko (pictured) and Roy.

THE HIDDEN TREASURE OF AREA ZERO

Just like we experienced with *Pokémon Sword & Shield*, a duo of expansion packs was set to arrive for *Pokémon Scarlet & Violet* by the end of 2023. *The Teal Mask* and *The Indigo Disk* takes our player characters to new Pokémon academies in the Pokémon world, where adventure is just outside the classroom door.

POKÉMON CONCIERGE

Pokémon is teaming up with streaming giant Netflix to deliver a brand-new animated series, but this one has an exciting twist. Featuring stop-motion animation, this breezy and relaxing series will be quite unlike anything we've seen before. Stop-motion notoriously takes a long time to produce, so expect to wait for this… but we're confident *Concierge* will be worth it.

POKÉDEX 906-1017

Our enrollment at the Naranja and Uva academies in Paldea has given us a reading list of 103 brand-new Pokémon to study. Taking inspiration from the Iberian Peninsula, this Pokédex expansion is a celebration of southern Europe. The names of many Pokémon, including starters Sprigatito and Fuecoco, pay homage to the Spanish language – Quaxly, meanwhile, stands as a strange outlier to its Grass and Fire counterparts. Speaking of that trio, this beginning triad are instant superstars that once again adopt a second type for their final forms, providing some added strategy to your choice. Meowscarada becomes Dark, Skeledirge takes on Ghost, while Quaquaval inherits Fighting, giving those on the wrong end of the weakness triangle a fighting chance.

Meanwhile, Pawmi, Fidough, Maushold, and Smoliv bring an irresistible cuteness factor to your Paldean adventure – while providing viable evolution lines that will pay off across your journey. The likes of Tinkaton, Annihilape and Clodsire have also proven to be frontrunning favourites amongst Pokéfans worldwide and give us new type combinations to experiment with.

Of course, as with any *Pokémon* Generation, the legendaries are the stars of the show, and *Scarlet & Violet*'s cover star companions are some of the strongest designs in the Pokédex. As we alluded to in the last Pokédex pages, Paldea's legendaries play with the concept of time. Koraidon and Miraidon are from the past and future respectively, with their modern link being Cyclizar. Additionally, they'll accompany you across your grand excursion across the country as a ridable friend that will help you traverse the landscape. Depending on if you snag Scarlet or Violet, you'll be treated to more time-bending 'Paradox Pokémon' that bear remarkable resemblances to old favourites. Roaring Moon looks like an ancient Mega Salmence, no? Or perhaps you think Iron Bundle resembles a futuristic robotic Delibird?

This latest Generation of Pocket Monsters has given us a cause for celebration, too, as the roster has surpassed the 1,000-Pokémon milestone! It's a testament to the skill of Game Freak's designers that they can continue to create iconic shapes, personalities and names to keep us entertained. Long may the trend continue!.

906 SPRIGATITO 907 FLORAGATO 908 MEOWSCARADA

909 FUECOCO 910 CROCALOR 911 SKELEDIRGE

912 QUAXLY 913 QUAXWELL 914 QUAQUAVAL

915 LECHONK 916 OINKOLOGNE 917 TAROUNTULA

918 SPIDOPS 919 NYMBLE 920 LOKIX

921 PAWMI 922 PAWMO 923 PAWMOT

924 TANDEMAUS 925 MAUSHOLD 926 FIDOUGH 927 DACHSBUN 928 SMOLIV 929 DOLLIV 930 ARBOLIVA 931 SQUAWKABILLY 932 NACLI

933 NACLSTACK 934 GARGANACL 935 CHARCADET 936 ARMAROUGE 937 CERULEDGE 938 TADBULB 939 BELLIBOLT 940 WATTREL 941 KILOWATTREL

DID YOU KNOW?

Most Mausholds you'll encounter will be a quartet of cute mice. However, in rare cases (and in raids) you can come across a special 'family of three' version.

942 MASCHIFF 943 MABOSSTIFF 944 SHROODLE 945 GRAFAIAI 946 BRAMBLIN 947 BRAMBLEGHAST 948 TOEDSCOOL

949 TOEDSCRUEL 950 KLAWF 951 CAPSAKID 952 SCOVILLAIN 953 RELLOR 954 RABSCA 955 FLITTLE

956 ESPATHRA 957 TINKATINK 958 TINKATUFF 959 TINKATON 960 WIGLETT 961 WUGTRIO 962 BOMBIRDIER 963 FINIZEN 964 PALAFIN

965 VAROOM
966 REVAVROOM
967 CYCLIZAR
968 ORTHWORM
969 GLIMMET
970 GLIMMORA
971 GREAVARD
972 HOUNDSTONE
973 FLAMIGO
974 CETODDLE
975 CETITAN
976 VELUZA
977 DONDOZO
978 TATSUGIRI
979 ANNIHILAPE
980 CLODSIRE
981 FARIGIRAF
982 DUDUNSPARCE
983 KINGAMBIT
984 GREAT TUSK
985 SCREAM TAIL
986 BRUTE BONNET
987 FLUTTER MANE
988 SLITHER WING
989 SANDY SHOCKS
990 IRON TREADS
991 IRON BUNDLE
992 IRON HANDS
993 IRON JUGULIS
994 IRON MOTH
995 IRON THORNS
996 FRIGIBAX
997 ARCTIBAX
998 BAXCALIBUR
999 GIMMIGHOUL
1000 GHOLDENGO
1001 WO-CHIEN
1002 CHIEN-PAO
1003 TING-LU
1004 CHI-YU
1005 ROARING MOON
1006 IRON VALIANT
1007 KORAIDON
1008 MIRAIDON
1009 WALKING WAKE
1010 IRON LEAVES
1011 DIPPLIN
1012 POLTCHAGEIST
1013 SINISTCHA
1014 OKIDOGI
1015 MUNKIDORI
1016 FEZANDIPITI
1017 OGERPON

THE TERASTAL PHENOMENON

This unique feature of Paldea lets Pokémon change their type mid-battle and gives them a fancy hat

Deep below Paldea within its 'Area Zero', scientists discovered a shocking discovery that enabled Pokémon to temporarily boost and change their types. This 'Terastal Phenomenon' manifests as a flurry of crystal that solidifies into a spiffy new hat for your Pokémon during battle. In a departure from Galar's larger-than-life Dynamax and Gigantamax mechanics, Terastalizing your Pokémon might seem a little lacklustre. But while we are still pondering the question, 'But why hats!?', this new battle tool is sure to liven up competitive battles. Imagine entering a showdown with a friend, where your Arcanine faces down a Gyarados, only for you to Terastalize your fiery furry friend into a surprise Electric type and deliver a showstopping Wild Charge while your rival tries to pick their jaw up from the floor. Some of the Tera hats your Pokémon adopt are cute Easter eggs from across *Pokémon* history, too. The Flying balloons are a homage to the Flying Pikachu card, and the Ghost iteration is the mysterious unidentified spooky sprite from the original *Red & Blue* games before you use a Sylph Scope to see those spectres. See if you can deduce some for yourself! We are sure fans of the TCG will recognise the Psychic one…

POKÉMON SCARLET & VIOLET

Pokémon's first foray into the open world was plagued with problems, but there's still plenty of fun to be had in Paldea

Words by Nikole Robinson

Game Freak, Nintendo and the overarching Pokémon Company were all unusually quiet throughout the development of *Pokémon Scarlet & Violet*. Though planning for the pair began around the same time *Sword & Shield* were being finalised – with those Generation VIII games released at the tail end of 2019 – the people behind *Pokémon* had plenty to throw at fans in the intervening years. Players were distracted with a slew of DLC, Generation IV remakes and the completely mould-breaking *Pokémon Legends: Arceus* before we heard even a whisper of Generation IX. But all that new content did nothing to quiet speculation about where the mainline series was headed, especially after *Legends: Arceus* gave players their best taste yet of what fans had been begging for for years: open landscapes full of wild *Pokémon. The Let's Go* games banished random encounters, *Sword & Shield* introduced the Wild Area, but *Pokémon Legends: Arceus* added personality – some Pokémon would attack on sight, while others would run and hide, and when left alone, these creatures would exhibit their own behaviours. Players could freely traverse areas that felt truly alive, and the hope was that Generation IX would take this idea and run with it. Barely a month after the launch of *Legends: Arceus* in January 2022, that year's Pokémon Day celebrations gave the first glimpses of a new Generation in a partly live-action teaser. As a room of antiques came alive around an unsuspecting security guard, the trailer transitioned to vibrant in-game scenes of vistas and bustling towns populated with Pokémon. Watchers were quick to pick up on the Spanish and Portuguese-inspired architecture, as well as the expansive range of biome diversity.

NEW INNOVATIONS

What's new for Generation XI?

THE OPEN ROAD

■ Throwing Trainers into a vast open world, you're allowed to venture in any direction you choose. However, a lack of level scaling limits you somewhat. You might accidentally wander into an area with wild Pokémon too strong to stand against, or overlevel your own squad so much that Gym Leaders are no longer a challenge.

LET'S GO!

■ As seen in select previous titles, you're able to call out the first Pokémon in your party to follow you around by hitting the ZR trigger. But you can also use the R button to direct your Poképal to collect items on the ground and enter battles on its own, with the winner decided based on type and level. Perfect for grinding XP and materials.

TERA POWER

■ We've seen Mega Evolution, Z-Moves and Dynamaxing, but in Paldea it's all about the Terastal Phenomenon. When a Pokémon Terastallizes, it turns crystalline and takes on its Tera type, boosting any moves of the same type.
A Pokémon's Tera type can be completely different to its original typing, allowing for some creativity

PICNIC PARTY

■ From the menu, you can set up a table for your team to gather around in the overworld. As well as replacing daycare as the new method to obtain Pokémon Eggs, you can play with, clean and check in with your squad. You can also use any ingredients you've collected to make sandwiches that provide unique bonuses.

STAY IN SCHOOL

■ Befitting the game's school setting, you can attend optional classes in Biology, Math, History, Languages, Battle Studies, Home Economics and Art, with six lessons per subject. Even Pokémon veterans might learn something new here, and doing well in your midterm and final exams will yield rewards and faculty friendships.

While the brief sequence showed off several upscaled and now-textured Pokémon models – the individual scales on Seviper and the metallic shine of Magnemite drawing particular attention – they were all returning monsters. Cutting back to live action, however, a frame lit up revealing official artwork of the three new starter Pokémon – unsurprisingly green, red and blue – before Scarlet & Violet's titles and release window were disclosed to eager viewers. To the surprise of many, it wasn't going to be a long wait.

After this short announcement, speculation about the setting, story and new monsters filled online forums, but so did worries that Game Freak was overworking itself to push out such an ambitious project so soon after Legends: Arceus. And subsequent trailers would highlight just how ambitious Generation IX would be. Along with finally allowing players to explore an open world in any direction they chose, there were promises of fully interactive four-player co-operative play, three separate storylines, the return of raid battles against the new Terastal Pokémon, the ability to command your Pokémon to battle on its own or find items for you, and much more. Each player would have a unique experience, forging their own path across a new part of the *Pokémon* world.

But after the games' worldwide release on 18 November 2022, fans were divided. *Pokémon Scarlet & Violet* delivered on all of their promises but were held back by technical issues, glitches, game crashes and poor-quality tiled textures that were reminiscent of Nintendo 64 and GameCube

titles. The frame rate dropped, breaking the immersion the open world offered, and some of the landscapes felt so barren that many were left disappointed while traversing them. The draw distance is impressive, but NPCs and Pokémon load in at a much closer range than the scenery, giving them the appearance of popping into existence when you get close enough.

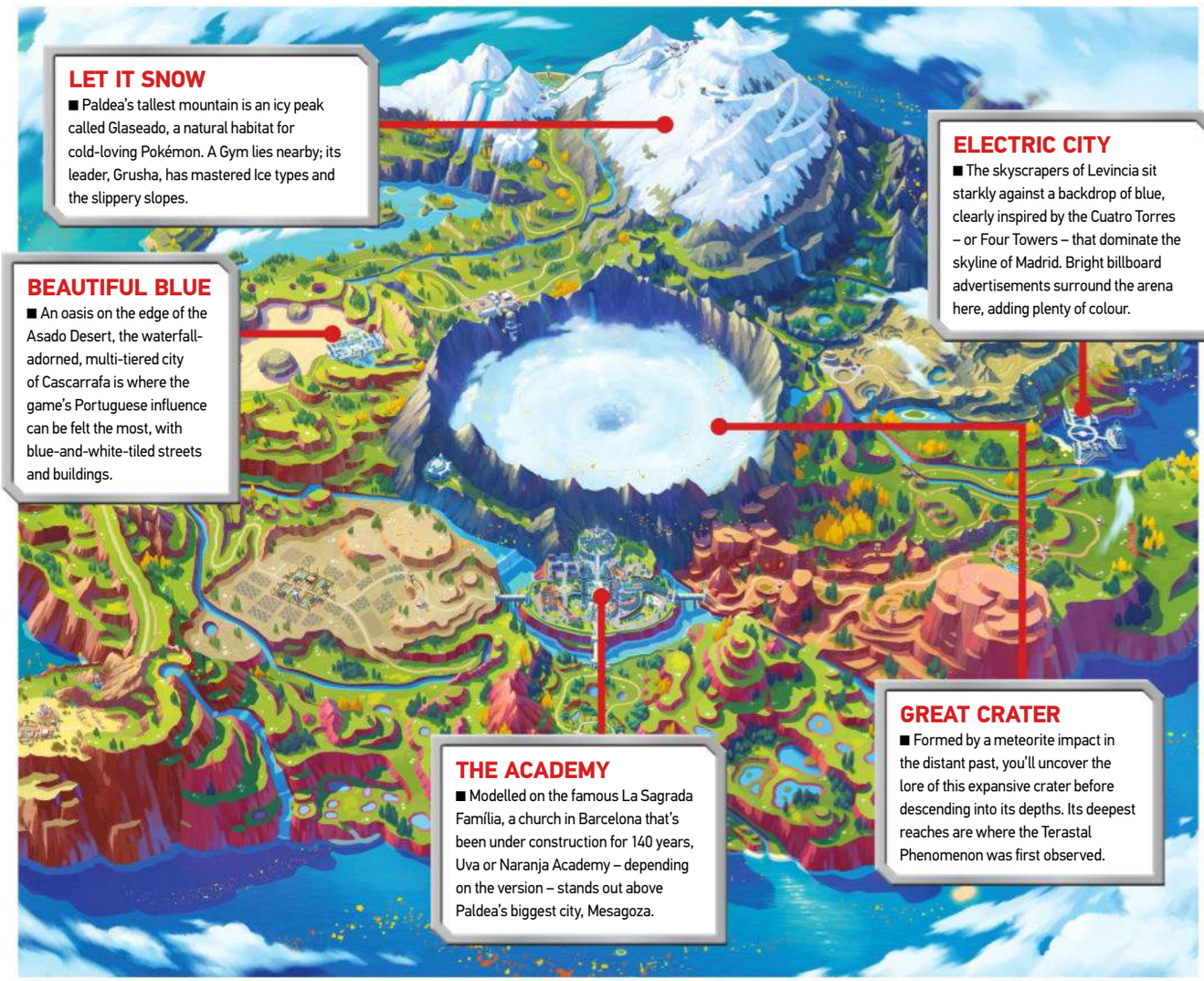
People were quick to decry the Nintendo Switch hardware as the reason the games looked rough and didn't run optimally, but others pointed out that *Breath Of The Wild*, *Xenoblade Chronicles* and *Monster Hunter* managed to present visually stunning worlds with the same processing power, shifting the blame back to the developer. After all, Game Freak is notorious for churning out titles near-annually, and 2022 had already seen the launch of a pioneering product.

Since *Legends: Arceus* and *Scarlet & Violet* were developed simultaneously, Game Freak's staff was stretched even thinner across two huge undertakings. With such a small core team, hundreds of contributors had to be sourced externally, many of whom would be working on their first *Pokémon* title. On top of that, both games were unlike anything the company had tackled before. Add in the fact that two of the three years of development time took place during a global pandemic that disrupted workflow and staff collaboration, and you had a recipe for disaster. To the studio's credit, Game Freak acknowledged the many faults, apologising for the state of the games at launch and taking on feedback to improve the player experience.

Players who could look past the low-resolution overworld, janky movements and comical glitches found themselves in a game world full of wonder . Shaking things up from the start, instead of a predesigned character, you can create a look all your own with some of the most varied appearance choices ever seen in the series. You're able to change face shape and features, and more eye and hair colour options than ever before let your individuality shine. It's more than a little ironic that the outfit system

GREETINGS FROM PALDEA

This Iberian-inspired map features plenty of diversity



LET IT SNOW

■ Paldea's tallest mountain is an icy peak called Glaseado, a natural habitat for cold-loving Pokémon. A Gym lies nearby; its leader, Grusha, has mastered Ice types and the slippery slopes.

BEAUTIFUL BLUE

■ An oasis on the edge of the Asado Desert, the waterfall-adorned, multi-tiered city of Cascarrafa is where the game's Portuguese influence can be felt the most, with blue-and-white-tiled streets and buildings.

ELECTRIC CITY

■ The skyscrapers of Levincia sit starkly against a backdrop of blue, clearly inspired by the Cuatro Torres – or Four Towers – that dominate the skyline of Madrid. Bright billboard advertisements surround the arena here, adding plenty of colour.

GREAT CRATER

■ Formed by a meteorite impact in the distant past, you'll uncover the lore of this expansive crater before descending into its depths. Its deepest reaches are where the Terastal Phenomenon was first observed.

THE ACADEMY

■ Modelled on the famous La Sagrada Família, a church in Barcelona that's been under construction for 140 years, Uva or Naranja Academy – depending on the version – stands out above Paldea's biggest city, Mesagoza.

doesn't have this freedom and leaves you stuck representing one of four uniform styles. You can purchase accessories, but this falls a little flat when you're wearing identical bright orange or purple attire to all the other students.

Another shift from the standard comes with the necessity of a mode of transport across Paldea. Not long after setting off for school, you'll encounter either Koraidon or Miraidon in a state of distress. This is a stark contrast to the usual endgame encounter, with the box Legendaries usually acting as a sort of final test of the strength you've gained on your journey. Instead, you spend the entire adventure bonding with your bike-themed buddy, slowly restoring their might and upgrading them with the ability to swim, climb and glide as you complete more story beats, in turn giving you greater access to locations across Paldea.

And the story is where *Scarlet & Violet* really shine… or in this case, stories. By the time you've enrolled at the academy and been unleashed on your own personal treasure hunt, you'll have met a lot of faces that will become familiar to you. Nemona, one of the most charismatic rivals in a long time, adores battling and pushes you to reach her level of Champion Trainer by taking on the classic Victory Road challenge: eight Gyms, an Elite Four and a final decisive battle. You'll also have to pass a variety of Gym Tests before you can face their leaders, and each cleverly utilises the Terastal gimmick in battle against you.

There's also the Path Of Legends, a task to hunt down five gargantuan Pokémon that turns into the surprisingly heart-wrenching tale of Arven and his beloved Mabosstiff. Emotions aside, this is how you'll power up your Legendary with new methods of traversal. The third storyline deals with taking down the 'baddies' of the academy, Team Star, hoodlums who hang out in fortified bases. You'll need to defeat waves of their Pokémon using a team of three to draw out and defeat their five squad bosses. The three storylines converge into one packed finale that takes place within Paldea's Great Crater, bringing everyone together to face the greatest threat yet.

Scarlet & Violet added 105 new Pokémon – 107 if you count all forms of the Spanish bullfighting-influenced Paldean Tauros – for a total Pokédex count of 400. And unlike the overworld, the models for the creatures look lovely. The Pokémon are expressive in and out of battle, and all of their distinguishing features all have distinct textures. There's an eclectic mix of themes going on, too. While some of the new designs fit the Iberian theme – olives, peppers, parakeets – the Treasures Of Ruin quartet are eastern in their look, names and backstory, and seem a little out of place.

Unlike Paldean Wooper and Tauros, Toedscool and Wiglett are separate from their Kanto counterparts, Tentacool and Diglett, marking the first convergent species to appear in *Pokémon*. The games also introduce Paradox Pokémon, time-displaced versions of known monsters from thousands of years in the past for *Scarlet* and the future for *Violet*, following either a prehistoric or robotic theme, with changes to their typing to correlate with this.

Special Tera Raid events have been centred on favourites outside of the Paldean Pokédex being given interesting Tera types, including two new Paradox Legendaries, Suicune and Virizion. As well as adding more creatures through challenging raids, the *Hidden Treasure Of Area Zero* DLC pack added even more content, with at least five new Pokémon and the availability of 230 returning monsters to add to your collection. With plenty to look forward to despite a lack of endgame content outside of competitive battling, shiny hunting and Tera Raids, it's clear that Game Freak will keep supporting *Pokémon Scarlet & Violet*, hopefully, while continuing to make the experience better through updates and events. Despite their flaws, these are still groundbreaking titles for Game Freak, which managed to take the *Pokémon* formula and semi-successfully apply it to an open-world format. There were so many innovations and great ideas, it's just that they weren't executed as well as they could've been in such a tight development window – a problem that comes with being just one moving cog in the *Pokémon* franchise.

POKÉMON PARALLELS

From trading card monoliths to pets made from data, these substitutes were more than just clones of our favourite Pocket Monsters

DIGIMON

Originally inspired by the Tamagotchi, *Digimon* launched in 1997 as a device that displayed a virtual pet made of data that could play and fight. The device had players starting off with a 'baby-level' creature with basic attacks, that they could then train to make it stronger. Selling 14 million units worldwide in its first year, it wasn't until 1999 when a game, *Digimon World*, and anime based on the device, *Digimon Adventure*, launched that the *Digimon* franchise really gained momentum. Produced by Bandai and Toei Animation, the TV show followed a group of seven children who are transported to the Digital World. This land is home to the Digimon creatures, who are hatched from Digi-Eggs, can Digivolve back and forth across multiple levels of evolutionary forms, and whose names always end in '-mon'. The children befriend a companion Digimon each and with their Digivices in hand, they learn that they are DigiDestined, and must save the Digital World from a villainous creature, Devimon.

The anime was a hit, and set in motion eight further seasons; 18 films, ten manga, over 50 videogames across multiple genres such as life simulation, trading cards, adventures, racing and strategy; comics and even a card game. In total there are currently over 1,400 Digimon, and there's no sign of stopping!

YOU MUST TRY...

DIGIMON STORY CYBER SLEUTH

PlayStation 4, PlayStation Vita, PC, 2015

Diverging from the traditional monster collection and battling characteristics that are prevalent throughout the franchises in this list, *Digimon Story Cyber Sleuth* centres on solving detective-style central mysteries rather than the creatures that are normally front and centre of its series.

TEMTEM

Picture a vast archipelago to explore with over a hundred eponymous creatures to befriend and catch, battles and trades with other players, and eight dojo leaders to beat across your journey. Sound familiar? No this isn't *Pokémon*; this is *Temtem*, a yet-to-be-fully-launched massively multiplayer game inspired by the mechanics and designs of our favourite *Pocket Monsters* series.

Temtem are caught using Temcards, and a Temdeck holds all the creatures you've caught so far. Spanish developers Crema have assured fans of the *Pokémon* games that though some of the mechanics are similar, there are more distinct variations in their game. By making the online and massive multiplayer features a core part of the experience, *Temtem* draws a big difference between itself and its inspiration. Players will be able to see one another inside of the game throughout their adventure and chat, whether that is at the beginning of the travels across the Airborne Archipelago or later on in their playthrough. As it's an MMORPG (similar to the likes of *World Of Warcraft*, *Destiny* and *Final Fantasy XIV*), the game promises regular content updates too, in the form of new events, missions, cosmetics and Temtem creatures.

Originally announced on Kickstarter, *Temtem* is partly crowdfunded and partly published by Humble Bundle. Unlike *Pokémon*, which is only available on Nintendo consoles and smartphones, *Temtem* is and will be available across multiple machines too. The game released to early access on PC and PS5, with Xbox Series S/Series X and Nintendo Switch versions due for release later on in 2021.

***Pokémon*'s success was instant. The games were a smash hit when they debuted in Japan, and that superstar status followed over into the West when the franchise arrived in the rest of the world by the end of the 1990s**. By then, *Pokémon* had taken over videogames, television screens, card games and more; it felt like you couldn't go a day without encountering the franchise in one way or another, and many companies looked on with envious eyes.

During the late 90s and early 00s, a new craze had arrived: the 'monster battler', and while some of the new franchises it birthed bore a resemblance to *Pokémon* by sheer happenstance, it was clear that others wanted a piece of the money pie that Nintendo and Game Freak had made for themselves. As *Pokémon*'s popularity persisted, many alternatives arrived out of the woodwork attempting to challenge the beloved series' worldwide dominance. Many didn't attempt an all-out instant media invasion like *Pokémon* achieved, and instead (some might say wisely) focused on videogames, or an anime series or even a card game, and then branched out into other frontiers.

While a portion of contenders fizzled out, many carved out success stories of their own. Franchises like *Digimon*, *Yu-Gi-Oh!* and *Yo-kai Watch* are beloved, and it can be argued that the likes of Agumon, Dark Magician and Jibanyan would never have existed if *Pokémon* hadn't become so popular. Over the next few pages, we'll delve into some of the more noteworthy *Pokémon* alternatives the world has to offer to see how they measure up to Nintendo's monster hit.

YO-KAI WATCH

Japanese folklore is rich with supernatural monsters and spirits. Known as yokai, it is these creatures that *Yo-kai Watch* draws inspiration from.

Developed and published by Level-5, *Yo-kai Watch* launched as a game in 2013 and saw the player assuming the role of Nate or Katie who finds a spirit in the woods called Whisper. Calling himself the 'butler Yo-kai', Whisper gives the player the Yo-kai Watch, enabling the player the ability to see the invisible monsters who are prevalent throughout the world. Whisper teaches the player all about Yo-kai, and along the way discover friendly Yo-kai who join the team and battle bad Yo-kai who seek to rule the world.

Once the anime aired in 2014, *Yo-kai Watch* gained momentum quickly in Japan. The anime surpassed *Pokémon*'s TV viewership rankings, and was dubbed the '*Pokémon* Killer', while the videogame benefited from this surge in popularity and shifted hundreds of thousands of extra copies.

Its sequel, *Yo-kai Watch 2*, followed similar success and outsold *Pokémon Omega Ruby & Alpha Sapphire* in Japan in its first year before winning the Grand Prize at the Japan Game Awards in 2015. It is still the tenth best-selling Nintendo 3DS game of all time. With three games released worldwide and a fourth still to be localised in the West, several spin-off games and apps, six manga, and three anime series, *Yo-kai Watch* is a newer *Pokémon*-inspired franchise compared to the others in this list that is biting tentatively at the heels of Pikachu and co.

YOU MUST TRY...

YO-KAI WATCH

Nintendo 3DS, 2013

You'll want to search through all kinds of objects to hunt for over 200 Yo-kai in this debut from Level-5. Your only clue? Citizens in the town acting just a little bit strange and unlike their usual self, hinting that a Yo-kai may just be nearby causing havoc.

YU-GI-OH!

Starting its life as a manga series in 1996, *Yu-Gi-Oh!* follows timid teen Yugi, who solves the enigmatic Millennium Puzzle, unleashing the incredible mind of an Ancient Egyptian pharaoh. The pharaoh inhibits the body of Yugi and is an elite games player, often beating villains and bullies in various 'Shadow Games'. Once the trading card game was introduced as part of these 'Shadow Games', the manga evolved over time and concentrated on just the trading card aspects across its franchise.

Yu-Gi-Oh! would then find fame in the west as an anime series that launched in 1998, focusing solely on the trading card game and the fantasy monsters that could be drawn to duel one another. With a generally darker tone, and more references to death and violence (that in the west were referred to as characters being 'sent to the Shadow Realm'), the series was seen as a more adult version of *Pokémon*.

While the anime had a 224-episode run, leading to multiple spin-off series and a handful of animated films, as well as over 50 videogames, it was the physical trading card game that was the biggest draw of the franchise. Debuting in 1999, there are estimated to have been 35 billion cards sold worldwide and almost $10 billion in sales as of 2021. *Yu-Gi-Oh!* trading card tournaments are regularly held around the world, and 'Duelists' are able to secure their place through officially hosted events and invitationals, with the aim of taking home first prize at the annual World Championship event.

YOU MUST TRY...

YU-GI-OH! LEGACY OF THE DUELIST: LINK EVOLUTION

Nintendo Switch, Xbox One, PlayStation 4, PC, 2020

This ideal jumping-off point for the franchise compiles over 20 years of card updates and additions into a single game. With 9,000 cards available, there's something for everyone, from new players looking to get stuck into the 'Heart Of The Cards' to older fans looking for a bit of nostalgia.

MEDABOTS

In the not-too-distant future of the 22nd century, advanced fighting robots battle each other in thrilling Robattles as instructed by their human trainers, or Medafighters. Comprised of six parts, these Medabots are made of a Medal (the heart and soul of the robot), Tinpet (the skeleton that assembles all of the other parts), a head, a pair of legs and two arms. This is what differs *Medabots* from the rest of the entries in this list, as each part determines a different aspect of the Medabot; for example, without a head, the Medabot cannot function, as it is where the Medal is stored. The arms determine the attacks, while the legs define how quick the Medabot can move. All of these parts must be functioning for a Medachange, a special attack that only some Medabots can perform, to activate.

Also known in Japan as *Medarot*, the first games debuted in 1997 on the Game Boy as two versions, with every subsequent game also featuring two versions that players could choose from – much like the *Pokémon* games. *Medarot 2* would be the best known across the series, spawning three sequel games, a trading card game and an anime. The TV series follows youngster Ikki Tenryou, who saves enough money for an outdated Medal-less Medabot called Metabee. When he chances upon a Medal in a river, Ikki is able to bring Metabee to life and finally work towards becoming a top Medafighter. As recently as 2020, there was a mobile version of *Medarots* released for iOS and Android.

YOU MUST TRY...

MEDABOTS AX: METABEE

Game Boy Advance, 2002

Instead of the turn-based battling systems that you may be accustomed to in typical role-playing games, the *Medabots AX* series is instead an action platformer that was interestingly never released in Japan, its country of origin. Instead, it was solely distributed in North America and drew its characters from the anime.

MONSTER RANCHER

In a world struck by disasters that humans were incapable of dealing with on their own, its god created monsters to assist them. Over time, these monsters were eventually used by the humans as weapons of war, angering the god, who subsequently sealed them inside of ancient, magical disc stones. Many years later, a tribe learns how to unseal these stones, releasing the monsters from their discs. For some time, the monsters coexisted peacefully with humans, who would breed and raise them, and later would enter them into competitive battles to fight against other monsters.

Focusing on breeding and the competitive sport element of battling, *Monster Rancher* was first introduced to the world as a videogame for the PlayStation in 1997. Though it has a similar release timing to *Pokémon* and is therefore often compared to the Pocket Monsters, *Monster Rancher* differs from *Pokémon* in that monsters are kept like virtual pets akin to *Digimon*. You can only raise a handful of creatures at a time, and they must be raised throughout their life. The rancher must keep them healthy with regular exercise schedules and learning moves that need to be maximised before it retires or dies of old age.

18 games were released in the *Monster Rancher* series in total, and perhaps the most unique feature was with the PlayStation games. By experimenting with removing the game disc and inserting a different one in its place, you could collect unique monsters. For example, if you inserted the Final *Fantasy VII* disc, you would receive a special Pixie creature in your game.

YOU MUST TRY...

MONSTER RANCHER 4

PlayStation 2, 2003

Bringing back fan favourites such as Mocchi and Golem, *Monster Rancher 4* also adds new features, such as a multi-breeding and customisable training programme. Raising monsters to the apex to ensure they are in their prime fighting condition is still very much at the heart of the game here.

THE STORY OF POKÉMON

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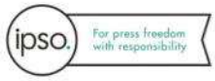

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